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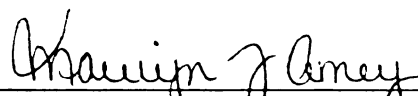
**IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE IDEAS: A MULTISITE CASE
STUDY OF PUTTING *LEARNING RECONSIDERED*
INTO PRACTICE**

presented by

Eric R. Jessup-Anger

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Ph.D. degree in Higher, Adult and Lifelong
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**IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE IDEAS: A MULTISITE CASE STUDY OF
PUTTING *LEARNING RECONSIDERED* INTO PRACTICE**

By

Eric R. Jessup-Anger

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE IDEAS: A MULTISITE CASE STUDY OF PUTTING *LEARNING RECONSIDERED* INTO PRACTICE

By

Eric R. Jessup-Anger

Leaders in colleges and universities across the United States are coming under increasing pressure to enhance the quality of programs and services on their campuses (Gensheimer, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Although administrators and faculty have access to a growing body of scholarship to improve institutional quality (e.g., Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005), the majority of institutions continue to struggle to put innovative ideas into practice (Bok, 2006; Duderstadt, 2000). Furthermore, leaders and change agents have limited literature to consult to enhance their efforts because few studies have examined implementation in postsecondary organizations. To provide further guidance to administrators, this study used a multi-site case study approach and a backward mapping analytic strategy to examine three divisions of student affairs that implemented *Learning Reconsidered* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004), a national report calling for a series of innovative policies and practices. Data were collected via individual and small group interviews using a semi-structured protocol. A review of available documents was also conducted. The data are presented in three, in depth case studies. The study concludes with a cross-case analysis of the implementation process and forwards implications for theory and practice.

Three broad, overarching findings relating to implementation emerged across the three divisions of student affairs examined in this study. These include: 1) the influence

of the initiation phase and adoption decision on implementation; 2) the multiple, cascading levels of adoption and implementation, and the shifting roles of senior student affairs officers and mid-level professionals; and, 3) the importance of technical and leadership capacity and how resources were employed to bolster professionals' capacity to implement. In addition, a river delta metaphor is presented that captures the iterative, complex, and relatively non-linear process by which innovative ideas are put into practice. The metaphor provides a framework for leaders and professionals throughout the organization to make sense of implementation and their role in the process.

The study concludes with implications for theory and practice. Theoretical implications include: 1) a changing conceptualization of the role of senior leaders and mid-level professionals as the implementation process unfolds; 2) how and when levers are employed is more influential than what levers are used; and, 3) the availability of sufficient time and space are the most influential levers. Recommendations for practice include: 1) the process should ideally stem from a period of organizational reflection; 2) organizational culture should be viewed as a road map, not a barrier; 3) the process should be inclusive of professionals throughout the organization; 4) change leaders should embrace their symbolic and behind the scenes role in the effort; 5) because of their central role in implementation, mid-level professionals must be adequately prepared to put innovative ideas into practice at the department level; 6) creativity and reasonable risk-taking should be promoted from the outset; and, 7) the pace and process by which technical and leadership capacity is bolstered needs ongoing attention from senior leaders and change agents.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Jody and Olivia
who have changed my world in the most wonderful of ways.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the persistent challenges facing administrators in colleges and universities is how to effectively lead their organizations in the midst of shifting environmental conditions and increasing calls for reform (Bok, 2006; Collins, 2005; Diamond, 2002; Duderstadt, 2000). This is particularly true today when more is being asked of the United State's educational system in the midst of the current economic crisis (Gensheimer, 2009). Consequently, complacency is rarely an option for the majority of institutions or their leaders. On the one hand, administrators and educators have access to a growing body of knowledge and recommendations to improve institutional quality. Indeed, scholars have made significant strides in numerous areas including advancing understanding of factors affecting student persistence (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1993), engagement (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005), and learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). On the other hand, putting these recommendations into practice continues to present significant challenges to academic leaders (Bok; Duderstadt). With the goal of providing further guidance to administrators seeking to implement innovative ideas in higher education writ large and student affairs specifically, I examined how three divisions of student affairs implemented *Learning Reconsidered* (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 2004), a national report calling for a number of innovative practices to improve the undergraduate student experience. Included among the recommendations was a call to focus institutional resources on promoting transformational student learning by developing and assessing learning outcomes. Kuk (2004) commented, "By merging concepts and research surrounding student and

community development and learning into a conceptual framework labeled *transformational learning*, the report [*Learning Reconsidered*] raises awareness of the importance of attending to the whole student and creates a realistic context for challenging the way higher education operates.

Throughout their history, student affairs administrators sought guidance from professional organizations and scholar practitioners to shape their collective values, priorities, and ultimately, their daily practice. Beginning with the release of the *Student Personnel Point of View* in 1937 (American Council on Education [ACE]), professional organizations actively promoted common professional values and encouraged effective practice to enhance student development. More recently, the *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994) and *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) encouraged student affairs professionals to prioritize learning across curricular and co curricular environments. To accomplish this goal, *Learning Reconsidered* provided a rationale for a campus-wide focus on student learning along with a series of recommendations describing what a division of student affairs should look like and what it should do to maximize student learning in curricular and co curricular environments.

The immediate response of practitioners to *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) was documented by the original authors in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (ACPA, Association of College and University Housing Officers – International [ACUHO-I], Association of College Unions International [ACUI], National Association of College Advisors [NACA], National Academic Advising Association [NACADA], NASPA, & National Intramural-Recreation Sports Association [NIRSA], 2006) by highlighting programmatic best practices while providing broad implementation

recommendations. Although numerous successful examples of implementation were included, few institutions nationwide appeared to systematically adopt the recommendations even though the document's call to focus on the promotion of student learning and collaborative practice is generally embraced throughout the profession (Blimling & Whitt, 1999). If student affairs professionals possessed wide agreement on the importance of promoting student learning and were aware of examples of programs that seem to accomplish this goal, why were more institutions not systematically implementing *Learning Reconsidered*?

This significant challenge of implementing calls for reform is not new. Nestled within the opening purpose statement of *Learning Reconsidered* was the recognition of the significant challenge of implementing calls for reform at the institutional level. The authors wrote, "We recognize that it has been difficult for many institutions to implement all of the excellent recommendations made in earlier documents" (p. 3). Even with ample literature documenting successful practice (e.g., Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andrea, Lyons, Strange, Krehbiel, & Mackay, 1991; Kuh et al., 2005) the systematic application of commonly accepted values, principles, and best practices such as those espoused in *Learning Reconsidered* varies widely among institutions (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). Yet, Keeling and his colleagues focused their attention on showcasing the end result of successful initiatives, not on the factors that affected the implementation process at the institutional level or how organizational actors navigated these factors to implement *Learning Reconsidered*.

As discussed by Keeling and his colleagues in *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), the primary barrier to widespread implementation does not appear to be

convincing professionals of what should be done or how it might look when completed but rather understanding how to navigate the various factors that affect implementation. There are myriad possible reasons for limited implementation in student affairs organizations of documents such as *Learning Reconsidered* including competing organizational priorities (Clark & Mason, 2001; Stone & Archer, 1990), incongruent policies (Ausiello & Wells, 1997), lack of sufficient fiscal or physical resources (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Clark & Mason, 2001; Stone & Archer, 1990), student affairs professionals being ill-equipped for new responsibilities (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Clark & Mason, 2001), staff who are resistant to assume new roles (Clark & Mason, 2001; Stone & Archer, 1990), lack of key leadership in the middle of the organization (Clark & Mason, 2001; Smith & Rodgers, 2005; Stone & Archer, 1990), and ineffective leadership from the senior student affairs officer (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Clark & Mason, 2001; Smith & Rodgers, 2005). Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) argue that implementation is the key challenge in mediating the successful incorporation of the ideas and innovations forwarded in earlier reform-minded documents. Therefore, what appears to be needed by practitioners seeking innovation is an increasingly nuanced understanding of the factors that influence implementation as well as how organizational actors navigate these factors during the implementation process.

Definition of Terms

It is important to clarify a number of terms and their relationship to one another in the context of this study. First, an innovation is defined as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 1983, p. 11). The umbrella innovation under examination in my dissertation is *Learning Reconsidered*

(ACPA & NASPA, 2004), a recent conceptualization of the role of student affairs in developing increasingly integrated and effective postsecondary learning environments. At the time of its release in 2004, *Learning Reconsidered* presented a “new playbook” (Fried, 2007, p. 2) for student affairs and higher education and was often viewed as innovative in many postsecondary institutions because of its fresh ideas and recommended practices.

Second, loosely borrowing from Rogers (1983), I define adoption as the organizational decision to select an innovation with the intent of enacting it in some form and to some degree. One example of adoption would be a division of student affairs’ selection of *Learning Reconsidered* as a document to guide decision-making in hiring, redesigning the organization, budgeting, or program planning. Though adoption does not necessarily mean that an organization immediately enacted *Learning Reconsidered*, the decision to adopt symbolizes the intention to do so.

Third, in contrast to adoption, defined as a decision more than a process, I borrow from Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) who described implementation as the action component of how an innovation such as *Learning Reconsidered* is put into practice. Consequently, I define implementation as a process that is loosely bounded on the front end by an organization’s decision to adopt an innovation and on the back end by the organization’s enactment of the innovation over time and its subsequent refining and routinizing into policy or practice. In addition, it is likely that how an organization decided to adopt *Learning Reconsidered* will influence how the implementation process unfolded. However, while adoption and implementation are often conceptualized as discrete components of the innovation diffusion process (Rogers, 1983), in practice there

is rarely a clear delineation of where adoption ends and implementation begins.

Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) articulated the lack of clear delineation when they wrote, “The reality of adoption decisions, then, is that they are as amorphous and indistinct as any other decision. And, in fact, they may not precede all implementation steps” (p. 199). Therefore, it is possible that in some divisions of student affairs the formal adoption of *Learning Reconsidered* might occur after components of the implementation process already began.

Finally, I define organizational change as a process by which a postsecondary institution shifts from operating in one manner to operating in a different way (Allen & Cherrey, 2003; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Keller, 2004; Kezar, 2001; Kotter, 1995). The process may involve a whole institution or a subset such as a department, an academic unit, or a division of student affairs. It may include adaptations, incremental or transformational, to the culture, structure, staffing, mission, values, priorities, budgeting, practices, or policies of an organization. As discussed earlier, it is assumed that *Learning Reconsidered* was likely a departure for many divisions of student affairs from previously held conceptualizations of their role and way of operating in relation to the broader institution. Because of this potential fundamental shift, divisions of student affairs that adopted *Learning Reconsidered* were often engaged in an organizational change process, planned or not, in order to enact the various recommendations. Though Kezar (2001) is careful to note that organizational change theories are broader than models of innovation diffusion or program implementation, the scholarly literature in higher education and student affairs rarely articulates a clear distinction between them. In this study I borrow from the organizational change literature to uncover expected challenges to program

implementation while also recognizing Kezar's valid point that organizational change is a broader concept than innovation diffusion or implementation.

Significance of the Problem

The primary issue that I explore in this study concerns the process by which divisions of student affairs implement innovative policies, programs, and practices such as those found in *Learning Reconsidered*. Illuminating this issue will provide change leaders practical recommendations to guide implementation efforts. A secondary issue under investigation is the impact of national reports on student affairs practice and policy. Although national reports such as *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) are common in postsecondary education (Hutcheson, 2007; Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Thelin, 2004), their impact is less certain (Asera, 2003; Hiatt & Stockton, 2003; Prados, Peterson, & Lattuca, 2005). Understanding the influence of reform-minded reports within the context of student affairs, and the process by which organizations implement them, may provide those charged with their creation, dissemination, and implementation more nuanced understanding of how to actualize the recommendations at the institutional level.

As demands on postsecondary institutions shift and the role of student affairs evolves, many divisions may need to adapt their mission, priorities, structure, and practice if they are to continue to align with the central academic mission of their institution (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). In their examination of the state of student affairs Rooney and Shaw (1996) wrote that, "on college and university campuses across the country, the role of student affairs is constantly changing" (p. 67). If student affairs organizations hope to implement successfully the recommendations called for by their national organizations in *Learning Reconsidered* (2004), leaders and change agents

should increase their understanding of how policies and programs are put into place and the factors that affect their implementation. Collins (1998) found that the use of planned change strategies by administrators often impacted the degree of success of organizational change efforts. Creamer and Creamer (1986) agreed when they wrote, “Studies of organizational development and of planned change are not abundant in student affairs, yet insight into the interaction of institutional factors is imperative to ensure successful program implementation” (p. 19). Additionally, Elmore (1980) noted that the majority of implementation research was descriptively vague and provided few concrete recommendations to guide practitioner decision-making. Guidance and empirically derived recommendations are needed if greater numbers of divisions of student affairs are going to successfully implement innovations such as *Learning Reconsidered* while increasing their alignment with the academic mission of their institution to enhance the quality of student learning.

Research Questions

The general lack of directly relevant research examining the implementation of innovative programs in student affairs has left administrators with significant blind spots during an era of shifting priorities. Implementation research can assist practitioners in understanding how organizations can act as “instruments to be capitalized upon and modified in the pursuit of policy objectives” (Elmore, 1980, p. 606) rather than viewing the organization as a barrier to implementation. With this goal in mind I examined three divisions of student affairs that were in various stages of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). I engaged in a multi-site case study of the

implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* using a backward mapping analytic strategy (Elmore, 1980).

I began the study seeking to uncover, from the perspective of staff responsible for implementation, what resources, collaborations, knowledge, skills, support or additional factors impacted their ability to implement programs and policies congruent with the recommendations of the report. I paid particular attention to factors that organizational actors were capable of manipulating either directly or indirectly. Second, I explored what role people in the next highest level of the organization had in supporting the implementation of the program, while remaining open to uncovering and exploring non-hierarchical relationships or factors. Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) implementation framework, nested within Rogers' (1983) broader innovation diffusion framework, loosely guided the investigation. In summary, I focused on the factors that mediated successful implementation and how individuals at various locations throughout the organization navigated these factors with the implementation process as the unit of analysis. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What was the implementation process employed by institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*?
2. At institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*, what factors influenced the implementation of the recommended policies and practices?
3. What were the roles and responsibilities of actors within and beyond the division of student affairs in the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*?
4. What organizational levers, if any, were employed to influence implementation?

Conceptual Framework

After reviewing a number of frameworks, I decided to combine Rogers' (1983) broader conceptualization of the innovation diffusion process with Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) more detailed framework of the implementation of innovations in organizational settings. Nesting Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) implementation framework inside Rogers' (1983) innovation diffusion framework let me focus on the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*, while recognizing that the implementation process could not be neatly divorced from the broader diffusion process, in particular, the adoption decision. Rogers' (1983) broader framework was an essential addition to the specificity provided by Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) conceptualization because it recognized that how and why an adoption decision was made likely influenced how the innovation was enacted throughout the organization. Therefore, though direct examination of the adoption of *Learning Reconsidered* was outside the scope of this study, Rogers' (1983) initiation phase, including the adoption decision and its associated processes, were considered in as much as they affected the implementation process. I begin by briefly reviewing both frameworks and then articulating the way in which I have nested Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990) within Rogers (1983).

Rogers' (1983) developed a two-phase model, consisting of five stages, which described the innovation diffusion process in organizations. Rogers (1983) conceptualized the two phases, initiation and implementation, as divided by an adoption decision. Initiation, the first phase, included "all of the information-gathering, conceptualizing, and planning for the adoption of an innovation, leading up to the decision to adopt" (p. 363). The first of two stages in the initiation phase, "agenda

setting,” included an organization’s recognizing that a problem existed as well as seeking innovations within the wider environments to alleviate the perceived problem. The second stage of the initiation phase, “matching,” involved considering possible innovations and the likelihood of their success within their specific organizational context. Matching also involved the planning and design of the best possible fit between the innovation and the organization to promote its successful implementation. Following initiation, the organization decided to adopt or reject an innovation. If a decision to adopt was made, the organization moved from the initiation phase into the implementation phase.

The implementation phase, the focus of my study, was defined by Rogers (1983) as “all of the events, actions, and decisions involved in putting an innovation into use” (p. 363). The first of three stages in the implementation phase, “redefining/restructuring,” included modifying the adopted innovation, as well as altering directly relevant organizational structures, with the goal of fashioning an innovation-organizational fit that would increase the likelihood of a successful implementation process. During the second stage of the implementation phase, “clarifying,” the relationship between the organization and the innovation were further elucidated as the innovation was put into regular use. Rogers’ (1983) final stage, “routinizing,” described the process by which the innovation was either subsumed under the organization’s identity and subsequently accepted as part of the normal activities, or abandoned.

Though Rogers’ (1983) conceptual framework provides a useful way of understanding the relationships between the initiation phase, the adoption decision, and the implementation phase of the innovation diffusion process, his description of the

specific factors affecting implementation were overly broad to guide my study. To alleviate this issue, I decided to nest Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) more specific organizational implementation framework within Rogers' broader innovation diffusion framework. Tornatzky and Fleischer noted seven key sets of activities that needed ample attention during implementation to encourage the successful enactment of innovations.

These included:

1. Understanding the characteristics of the innovation.
2. Developing measures of the effectiveness of the innovation.
3. Planning and setting the pace of implementation.
4. Redesigning the organization.
5. Modifying human resource policies.
6. Redesigning jobs.
7. Installing and integrating the innovation with the existing system.

These seven components of Tornatzky and Fleischer's (1990) implementation framework, nested within Rogers' (1983) conceptualization of the innovation diffusion process, guided my exploration of how divisions of student affairs implemented *Learning Reconsidered*, including the factors that mediated the process and how organizational actors navigated these factors.

Overview of the Dissertation

The second chapter of the dissertation sets the context for the study by providing an examination of the influence of national reports in US postsecondary education, discusses student affairs divisions as organizations, reviews relevant organizational change literature and concludes with an analysis of the scholarship on implementation in

student affairs. The third chapter is devoted to a discussion of the research design and methods used in this study. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters comprise three comprehensive case narratives that capture the implementation process within each individual organization. The final chapter provides a cross-case analysis of the implementation process and includes a discussion of overarching findings, presents a metaphor that captures the implementation process, and forwards implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is multifaceted. First, I will situate the study in an historical and scholarly context by highlighting what researchers understand to be the impact of national reports on postsecondary organizations and the possible reasons for their influence. The scholarship on the impact of national reports paints a muddier picture of the influence of many of these foundational documents than is commonly believed. Second, I will discuss the organizational nature of divisions of student affairs, including their history, structure, and culture. Third, I will provide an overview of the relevant scholarship on organizational change including the factors reported as particularly influential in postsecondary change efforts. I will conclude with a review of what is known about organizational change and implementation within the context of student affairs organizations specifically.

National Reports in U.S. Postsecondary Education

One way that individuals, associations, and government bodies seek to influence U.S. postsecondary institutions is through writing and disseminating national reports. Although reports are commonplace in higher education (Hutcheson, 2007; Thelin, 2004) and student affairs (Allen & Garb, 1993; Nuss, 2003), their impact and the contextual and organizational factors that mediate their influence is less understood. As scholars continue to examine factors affecting change efforts in postsecondary education, a growing body of literature on the impact of reports is emerging. This section provides a brief overview of a number of national reports, their impact on policy and practice, and the factors that mediated their impact.

The use of written reports to influence postsecondary education was popularized following the release of Abraham Flexner's *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (1910). The *Flexner Report*, as it is more commonly called, was widely credited with dramatically improving the quality of medical practice in the United States (Asera, 2003; Hiatt & Stockton, 2003). Today, the "Flexner Strategy" is often evoked in the rhetoric of reformers when they suggest the use of empirically supported reports with pointed recommendations will solve the various challenges facing academia (Murray, 2000). In short, a "Flexner Strategy" entails convening a group of reformers, gathering evidence, recommending solutions, and writing a report that provides solutions for a current problem or crisis.

Although Flexner's (1910) report continues to be held in high esteem by present-day reformers, the story behind its impact is less clear. Responding to calls for the use of a "Flexner Strategy" to reform teacher education, Asera (2003) questioned the conventional wisdom of the influence of the *Flexner Report* on medical education at the time of its release. She cautioned:

To understand the impact of the *Flexner Report*, it is necessary to go back into history and look behind the simplistic explanation that has come down over time.

There is more to the story than a critical report with a set of recommendations and a high measure of compliance across the field. (p. 1)

Asera's historical analysis concluded that the impact of the report was fueled by changes already underway during the period of its release coupled with an influx of significant

financial resources from philanthropies that funded medical schools' implementation of the recommendations.

Regardless of the actual impact of the *Flexner Report* in reforming medical education, its symbolic power continues to inspire numerous reformers to focus on developing and disseminating reports rather than pursuing other avenues to influence policy and practice. In a testament to their perceived power, the number of reports over the past 100 years increased substantially as higher education moved to a more central place in the United States (Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Thelin, 2004). Over the past 20 years dozens of reports were issued by foundations (e.g., Boyer, 1987, 1990a, 1990b; Wingspread, 1993), federal agencies and departments (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 1983, 2006), state governments (e.g., Cherry Commission, 2004), accrediting bodies (e.g., ABET, 1997), and professional associations (e.g., Association of American Colleges and Universities [AACU], 2002; American Association of Higher Education [AAHE], ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; ACPA, 1994; ACPA & NASPA, 2004), each with the intent of spurring various changes in colleges and universities. Professional associations devoted to improving practice in student affairs such as the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators were common contributors as were groups such as the American Council on Education, Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Carnegie Foundation. The common thread among these groups was their focus on promoting the development of powerful undergraduate learning environments to improve student learning.

Postsecondary scholars' perspectives of the relative impact of these recent reports on colleges and universities are mixed. Stark and Lattuca (1997) articulated that reports focused on postsecondary curricular change often had limited utility because of the decentralized system of higher education in the United States that often frustrated widespread reform efforts. They noted that if reports "stimulate modest discussion before fading into oblivion" (p. 97) they were often considered successful by their authors. Yet, in their review of curricular reform during the 1980s, Stark and Lattuca concluded that internal efforts to affect curricular change were most often ignited by external calls for reform. Supporting this latter assertion, the authors reported the results of a national survey by the American Council on Education administered during the 1984–1985 and 1985–1986 academic years. The survey found that faculty governance bodies discussed reports calling for curricular change at 45% and then 61% of their institutions; at 28% and 36% of the institutions, the reports prompted changes in academic programs. In sum, the impact of these reports on curriculum reform was at minimum increased discussion among faculty governance groups and at most, some influence on the direction of curricular change.

Another perspective on the impact of national reports was explored in Rice's (2002) analysis of the influence of Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990b) on expanding the definition of faculty scholarship and research. Rice argued that the report should be viewed "as a 'tipping point' phenomenon – a critical turning point in what is fundamentally valued in the scholarly work of faculty members" (p. 8). He articulated that *Scholarship Reconsidered* was similar to the *Flexner Report* in that each was connected to a "key figure" at the height of his influence that collected already accepted

intellectual resources and packaged them in a new manner that refocused the conversation, thereby allowing reform efforts to progress. Though Rice (2002) argued that *Scholarship Reconsidered* succeeded in broadening definitions of scholarship, he also voiced concern that Boyer's call had the unintended impact of increasing faculty responsibility without allowing them to let go of earlier expectations. Rice wrote, "An implicit change strategy – an incremental, add-on approach – has been implemented" (2002, p. 16).

One reason for the additive response is explained by postsecondary institutions' loosely-coupled nature (Weick, 1976). Loosely-coupled organizations are more likely to change through addition rather than by accretion, exchange, or transformation (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Therefore, while numerous campuses responded to *Scholarship Reconsidered*, few successfully transformed institutional systems such as tenure processes that dictate faculty roles. When systemic change was achieved, such as in the case of Western Carolina University, the implementation of *Scholarship Reconsidered* was slow and often fractious taking nearly 20 years of stop and start initiatives to achieve (Jaschik, 2007).

In addition to efforts to influence postsecondary education writ large, accrediting bodies and philanthropic organizations in professional fields such as engineering (Prados, Peterson, & Lattuca, 2005) and teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Murray, 2000) commonly aim to shift curricular focus or dictate learning outcomes through the use of national reports. One example is the effort by ABET (formerly the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology) (1997) that began as a response to concerns raised by the engineering education community, preceded by including key

constituent groups in identifying current barriers to improving the quality of engineering education, and concluded with the collaborative development of recommended adjustments to the accreditation process in the form of Engineering Criteria 2000 [EC2000]. The new criteria forwarded by EC2000 emphasized program objectives, learning outcomes, assessment, and continuous improvement, and deemphasized specific curricular expectations such as course requirements. Following the initial draft of EC2000, recommendations were shared in workshop format for public comment with the goal of crafting a new accrediting process that would be supported by multiple constituencies and implemented successfully. Though the implementation of the new criteria was not without challenges (e.g., faculty resistance and need for additional training), Prados' and his colleagues' initial scholarly analysis concluded that EC2000's focus on "learning outcomes, assessment, and continuous improvement rather than detailed curriculum specifications" (p. 165) was "changing the face of engineering education" (p. 175).

Prados, Peterson, and Lattuca (2005) documented shifts in educational practices and the perceived influence of EC2000 on them. In a national survey of program chairs and tenured faculty they found that faculty credited EC2000 as influencing curricular and pedagogical changes at much lower rates (28%) than the faculty themselves (80%). These findings, when considered alongside their analysis of the influence of EC2000, support Stark and Lattuca's (1997) earlier conclusion that although changes to curriculum and pedagogical practice were perceived by faculty to be driven by internal organizational actors, external reports were often a significant impetus for igniting internal reform efforts. What remained unexamined in Prados et al.'s (2005) analysis was how EC2000

was implemented in schools of engineering and the mediating organizational and contextual factors. The authors highlighted the need for an implementation study to understand how such processes unfold in their call for further research to illuminate the conditions under which “continuous improvement concepts become part of faculty culture” (p. 178).

Similar to the larger postsecondary environment, student affairs professionals heard repeated challenges through national reports to change the focus of their work or improve the quality of practice over the past 80 years (Allen & Garb, 1993; Nuss, 2003.) However, unlike higher education writ large or professional preparation programs specifically, most reports focusing on student affairs were written by associations or individuals within the profession. The first national report, *The Student Personnel Point of View* [SPPV] (1937, 1949), was written by two groups of national leaders convened to provide a foundational document to guide the emerging profession. The first edition articulated a common professional philosophy, outlined preferred roles and contributions of student personnel administrators, and provided direction for the continued development of the profession. In articulating the emergent philosophy the authors wrote, “This philosophy imposes upon educational institutions the obligation to consider the student as a whole... It puts emphasis, in brief, upon the development of the student as a whole person rather than upon his intellectual training alone” (ACE, p. 18).

Though no known empirical studies analyzed the impact of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937, 1949) on student affairs practice at the time of its release, Nuss’ (2003) historical review of the development of student affairs noted the SPPV’s continued influence on the profession today. Nuss (2003) cited three specific examples to

illustrate the SPPV's lasting impact: (1) The reports' articulation of holistic student development as central to the work of the profession continues to be a primary guiding foundation of the profession; (2) The essential role of scholarship on college students remains a guidepost for professional and organizational behaviors; and (3) The outline provided in 1937 and subsequently expanded in the 1949 version of the SPPV of key services, their missions, and goals remains evident in the structure and work of student affairs organizations today. As Nuss noted, the *Student Personnel Point of View* significantly influenced the philosophy, values, priorities of the student affairs profession today and the structure and organization of student affairs practice on campuses across the United States. What is less certain is if and how the SPPV influenced national norms and campus practices at the time of its release, or, if it merely captured the emerging values and practices of the student affairs profession already widely embraced. Finally, if the *Student Personnel Point of View* forwarded a previously unarticulated vision for the student affairs role in postsecondary institutions, how did institutions implement its recommendations and what factors influenced their level of success?

The lack of understanding of how early reports were implemented and their direct impact on student affairs did not deter the professional associations from writing and disseminating numerous reports with the goal of influencing the development of the profession and campus-based policy and practice (e.g., *Joint Statement on Student Rights*, 1967; *Student Development Services in Postsecondary Education and Freedoms*, 1975; *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education: A Return to the Academy*, 1972). As ACPA and NASPA gained legitimate authority following their emergence as the leading national student affairs associations, they frequently issued

reports to set professional standards, guide practice, and focus efforts on student development and learning. These and other associations were particularly prolific over the past two decades with the release of *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994), *Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1996), *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling & Whitt, 1999), *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (ACPA et al., 2006).

Similar to the minimal attention paid to the impact of early national reports on student affairs practice, the influence of recent reports and the factors that mediated their impact has rarely been examined by scholars. One exception was Smith and Rogers' (2005) ethnomethodological case study of a single institution. This study examined how *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994), *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1996) and *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling & Whitt, 1999) were "understood and utilized as guides to design and implement practice in a student affairs division" (p. 472). Foremost among their findings was that the "commitment and leadership of the senior student affairs officer" (p. 476) was the most significant factor in the division's successful incorporation of the documents and their espoused perspectives. In addition, they found eight patterns of behavior incorporated by the senior student affairs officer that shaped and cultivated values and priorities within and beyond the division. These included: (1) Providing visionary leadership; (2) Communicating a clear mission focused on the ideas in the guiding documents; (3) Creating learning oriented institutional traditions; (4) Expecting a divisional shift from a student services to a student learning perspective; (5) Hiring staff members who fit the organizational ethos and approach; (6) Using research, evaluation, and assessment to

inform practice and decision-making; (7) Providing sufficient resources to fund new programs and staff development; and (8) Encouraging an institutional shift from a faculty-centered to a student-centered orientation.

A second finding forwarded by Smith and Rogers (2005) was the influence of a change agent in the middle of the organization to shepherd the implementation of recommendations on a day-to-day basis. They found that the key to successful implementation was the presence of a dedicated mid-level administrator with a flexible job description who operated across organizational boundaries and possessed the “credentials, competence, and style” (p. 477) to gain the respect and support of faculty, provide leadership at the divisional and institutional levels, promote professional development among colleagues, and advocate for the initiative.

In addition to their findings concerning the importance of administrative leaders during the incorporation of recommendations, Smith and Rogers (2005) uncovered organizational factors that mediated the level of implementation. First, they found that although each department in this division incorporated the reports’ recommendations into its practice, some placed them as the primary focus of work while others incorporated them as a secondary focus. Four organizational factors were found to influence the level of implementation: (1) The professional paradigm held by individuals and its congruence with the recommendations; (2) The nature of the department’s identity; (3) The level of knowledge possessed by professionals of the theories and research needed to implement the recommendations; and (4) The level of personal commitment to the recommendations. In other words, Smith and Rogers determined that the incorporation of the recommendations was mediated by the nature of the work of the department and the

perceived congruence of the recommendations with the values, mission, and priorities of the individual department and student affairs professional. Finally, Smith and Rogers concluded that individuals often lacked the preparation or experience to internalize the recommendations and were therefore, unable to effectively implement the recommendations even after agreeing to adopt them. This finding is particularly salient for leaders and change agents seeking to implement a program or policy as it draws attention to the influence of the different levels of knowledge and skills possessed by professionals charged with implementing the initiative and the impact of this variation on the level of success.

In summary, with the significant and continuously increasing volume of “Flexner Style Reports” calling for reform in U.S. postsecondary education, a casual observer might understandably assume that this style of report had been successful in earlier eras in influencing higher education. However, there are mixed conclusions about their impact on institutional level policy and practice (Asera, 2003; Nuss, 2003; Prados et al., 2005; Rice, 2002). One significant hurdle facing reform efforts is the challenge highlighted by the authors of *Learning Reconsidered* who acknowledged the difficulty of implementing “all of the excellent recommendations made in earlier documents” (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 3). The factors cited by scholars as mediating the implementation of these reports can be lumped into three areas: (1) The wider context into which the reports are released; (2) The specific institutional context in which they must be implemented; and (3) The organizational nature of postsecondary institutions.

Today, the global and postsecondary contexts in which student affairs organizations operate are rapidly changing (Duderstadt, 2000; Friedman, 2005; Kirp,

2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In response, divisions of student affairs have been challenged to adapt to meet these shifting expectations by their national organizations and scholars (ACPA & NASPA, 2004; Love & Estanek, 2000). In the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*, Keeling wrote:

Regardless of our past accomplishments or disappointments we are all, as colleagues and educators, now accountable to students and society for identifying and achieving essential student learning outcomes and for making transformative education possible and accessible for all students. (p. 3)

The national call sounded in *Learning Reconsidered* responded to pressures felt in the external environment and manifesting within collegiate environments. However, postsecondary institutions have long been regarded as some of the most stable institutions in Western society (Duderstadt; Thelin, 2004) and described as unlikely candidates for the transformative change advocated in *Learning Reconsidered* (Eckel & Kezar, 2003). Therefore, though it appears that the wider context into which *Learning Reconsidered* was released in 2004 was primed to drive the implementation of the recommendations forwarded in the document, the influence of specific institutional contexts and the nature of postsecondary institutions and divisions of student affairs likely have influenced the depth and breadth of implementation.

Student Affairs in American Colleges and Universities

In order to understand how divisions of student affairs might implement innovative ideas and practices such as those forwarded in *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), it is helpful to be aware of their organizational nature and its influence on change efforts. In this section, I provide an overview of student affairs as a profession

and divisions of student affairs as organizations by focusing on their historical mission, core values, culture, structure, and functional areas. I then briefly describe their relationship to the broader postsecondary organizations in which they operate and conclude by discussing contemporary organizational perspectives on divisions of student affairs including how they vary across institutional settings.

A Brief History of Student Affairs

Divisions of student affairs – the collection of non-academic professionals, programs, and services that support student learning, growth, and development in colleges and universities - are a uniquely American invention (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1938; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006; Nuss, 1998; Rhatigan, 2000; Sandeen, 2001).

Sandeen (2001) described student affairs as follows:

Most colleges and universities in the United States provide support services and related programs to their students. The institutional component most intimately involved in the process is usually referred to as student affairs, student services, or student life, and most institutions are expected by students, parents, and the general public to provide such programs and services. (p. 181)

The relatively young profession emerged late in the 19th century with the appointment of LeBarron Russel Briggs in 1891 as Dean of the College at Harvard (Fley, 1977) and the 1892 appointment of Marion Talbot as Dean of Women at the University of Chicago (Fley, 1978). Promoting holistic student development or learning has remained relatively consistent as the espoused mission of student affairs, yet, the increased size and complexity of modern divisions of student affairs would make them unrecognizable to the early deans.

The birth and development of the student affairs profession was driven in part by the growth of postsecondary institutions and the resulting need to build administrative structures and programs that supported a significant influx of students with escalating needs (Appleton, Moore, & Vinton, 1978; Nuss, 1998; Rhatigan, 2000; Sandeen, 1991).

Rhatigan (2000) summarized:

It is evident that several factors influenced the development of this new field of work, including the development of land-grant institutions and the rise of public colleges and universities; expanding enrollments and the accompanying increase in the heterogeneity of student populations; social, political, and intellectual ferment in the United States; the rise of coeducation and the increase in number of women entering educational institutions; the introduction of the elective system in higher education; and an emphasis on vocationalism as a competitor to the traditional liberal arts. (p. 5)

As a result of the increasing organizational complexity of colleges and universities, presidents were stretched in new directions that drew attention away from their historical role as the moral head of the institution (Rhatigan, 2000). Simultaneously, the rising influence of the German model of higher education resulted in faculty shifting their focus towards research and other scholarly endeavors and away from the intensive instruction of students (Johnson, 1970; Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004). In response to the changing roles of presidents and the faculty, coupled with a continued commitment to students' moral and spiritual development (Sandeen, 2001), colleges increasingly appointed early deans to fill the role of counselor, adviser, teacher, tutor, and disciplinarian (Clement & Rickard, 1992). Additionally, the arrival of women on many campuses challenged

colleges ill-equipped for co-education to seek the expertise of the pioneering deans of women. Sandeen (1991) wrote, “The main role of the dean of women was not that of disciplinarian or chaperone but an expert on women’s education in a coeducational institution” (p. 12). Within its first thirty years, the profession had evolved significantly filling multiple roles and responsibilities ranging from advocate to administrative generalist to educational specialist. Today, these early roles remain at the core of many student affairs professional’s identity and job descriptions.

Responding to the increased scope and complexity of student affairs work in postsecondary institutions, national leaders released the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937, 1949) with the goal of promoting consistent professional values, coherent organizational structures, and standards for practice across institutions. Numerous colleges responded by reorganizing their student services and programs to align with its recommendations (Sandeen, 2001). In addition to having a significant impact on the services offered, the *Student Personnel Point of View* also stressed the educational role of student affairs work and the importance of cooperation with academic departments to achieve the institutional mission. One of the primary authors of the *Student Personnel Point of View* and a colleague wrote:

In our opinion, the student personnel program must take its stand with those who conceive of the student not only as an intellect, but also as a total organism whose learnings... are importantly conditioned by the way he acts and feels, as well as by the words he reads and hears and by his logical thought. The student personnel program must be built on a recognition of the essential interrelation between thought, feeling, and action. (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1938, p.11)

Though early documents such as the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1937; 1949) focused on the education of the whole student, they parsed out the co curricular student experience as the domain of student affairs and ceded the curriculum and academic instruction as the domain of the faculty.

The early focus of student affairs professionals on students' social and moral development within the co curricular environment to the detriment of attention to intellectual development and the academic experience of students is frequently criticized as inadvertently promoting a professional culture that rarely embraces holistic development in practice as robustly as it does in its rhetoric (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2006; Woodward, Love, & Komives, 2000). Another vestige of **this** early division of labor is the infrequent collaboration on many campuses between **student** affairs professionals, academic administrators, and faculty (Bloland, Stamatokos, & Rogers, 1996). Kezar (2003) noted the rise of multiple organizational and professional **barriers** that challenged collaborative practice including "incorrect perceptions and lack of **knowledge** about each other's jobs, the alienating and confusing jargon of **differentiated** professions, increased specialization, and the financial competition between those **two** groups" (p. 137). In summary, as divisions of student affairs grew in professionalization, specialization, and complexity in the name of enhancing student **learning** and development, leaders inadvertently created structural and cultural barriers that limited the success of collaborative enterprises such as those espoused in *Learning Reconsidered* that are viewed as essential to increasing student learning in collegiate **contexts** (Kuh, 1996; Kuh et al., 1991).

Contemporary Student Affairs

Today, student affairs and its associated programs and services exist on every college campus in the United States (Hirt, 2006; Manning et al., 2006; Sandeen, 1991).

Over the past 100 years the roles and responsibilities once delegated to a single dean have evolved substantially. Manning described the changes:

Student affairs practice has evolved into complex, sophisticated work, often involving large staffs, substantial budgets, and thoughts of square feet of facilities to manage. Part of the challenge student affairs has faced over the years is to determine its niche, given that practitioners in this field are educators, managers, public relations specialists, and more. (p. 5)

Although it is too simple to say that student affairs work involves the coordination of **the** majority of the non-academic components of postsecondary institutions, it is a **reasonable** place to begin. A partial list of common functions that fall within most **divisions** of student affairs includes admissions and recruitment, orientation, registration and **records**, financial aid, academic advising, student support services, international **student** services, student activities and unions, counseling services, career development, **residence** life, services for student with disabilities, intercollegiate activities, family **programs** and child-care services, student health care, dining and food service, judicial **affairs**, **community** service, leadership development, recreation and fitness programs, and **student** research, assessment, and evaluation (Sandeen, 1996). Though many of the **forementioned** functional areas exist in some form at most institutions, each division is **unique** in how it is organized. Factors that influence organizational design include the **institutional** type and size, mission, history, professional background of the staff,

available resources, technology, student needs, and the culture of the college or university in which the division is situated (Creamer; Winston, & Miller, 2001; Hirt; 2006; Manning et al., 2006; Sandeen, 2001).

Partly because of their vertical orientation (Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007), contemporary divisions of student affair have been described as resembling traditional organizations in their structure (Fenske, 1990). If one examined an organizational chart of a contemporary division, it would resemble a pyramid with a wide base. At the top of most divisions is a senior student affairs officer with the title of vice president, dean, or the equivalent who generally reports to either the senior academic officer or the president of the institution (Sandeen, 1996). Under the senior student affairs officer are anywhere from a handful to a dozen or more mid-level administrators responsible for the semi-autonomous coordination of one or more functional areas. Mid-level professionals are often highly educated, well-trained, and hold the title of director or coordinator. The majority of positions within divisions of student affairs are found at the bottom of the organizational chart filled by entry-level professionals such as academic advisors or hall directors who themselves operate in a relatively autonomous manner (Carpenter, 2001). Though divisions are frequently organized using a traditional structure, they vary widely in their degree of centralization, alignment with institutional missions, Professionalization, collaboration within and beyond the division, student-centeredness, and resource allocation patterns (Hirt, 2006; Manning et al., 2006).

Because of the nature of postsecondary institutions in general and student affairs in particular, understanding the organizational structure only provides a limited view of how an innovation such as *Learning Reconsidered* was implemented. This is in part

because divisions of students affairs operate with ambiguous and conflicting goals, fluid participation, unclear technology, clients who participate in governance, a highly educated professional workforce that operates with relative autonomy, and a loosely-coupled structure (Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007). Therefore, a more accurate articulation of how they actually operate would be as a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979) or organized anarchy (Cohen & March, 1986).

Variations across Institutional Settings

Student affairs as a profession has achieved wide agreement on its core values, mission, and role in relation to promoting student learning (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), yet how divisions of student affairs pursue these ends varies significantly (Kuh et al., 2005; Manning et al., 2006). Recent scholarship illuminated differences in the organization of student affairs (Manning et al., 2006) and variations in the nature of work (Hirt, 2006) across diverse institutional types.

Hirt (2006) conducted a series of studies to understand the differences in student affairs work in community colleges, research universities, Jesuit institutions, comprehensive colleges, liberal arts colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, and historically Black colleges and universities among others. She collected data through focus groups, a national survey of student affairs professionals, and a calendar study that asked professionals to track their professional activity over a defined period of time. Hirt found significant variance across divisions in different types of institutions including their organizational nature and the roles, responsibilities, and day-to-day priorities of student affairs professionals. Because my study examined the implementation of

Learning Reconsidered at a specific institutional-type – comprehensive colleges and universities - I focus my attention on Hirt's findings at those institutions.

Hirt (2006) found that because of the mission, culture, and organizational presses at comprehensive institutions, student affairs professionals in these environments took a more generalist orientation to their work than those at other institutional types.

Professionals reported working with a racial, ethnic and socio-economically diverse spectrum of students. They described their institutions matter-of-factly as political, bureaucratic, and centralized. Hirt hypothesized that these organizational characteristics resulted in professionals often developing advanced strategic planning skills to effectively navigate their environment. In addition to change initiatives emanating from local leaders, because many of the comprehensive institutions were part of larger state systems, systemic change was endemic at these colleges and universities institutions and complicated the governance process within any single institutional setting. Though Professionals viewed change as often being quickly enacted in comprehensive institutions, the outcome of change efforts was rarely viewed as beneficial. In a finding that appeared inconsistent with the pace of change described by participants, Hirt also uncovered that decision-making was viewed as laborious at these institutions and took significantly longer than at other types of colleges and universities. The slow pace of decision-making was seen as leading divisions of student affairs at comprehensive institutions to be more reactive than proactive. Finally, Hirt found that collaboration with academic administrators and faculty, though still chilly and tentative, was more frequent at comprehensive institutions than other types of colleges and universities in her study.

In summary, contemporary divisions of student affairs are vertically oriented (Keeling et al., 2007; Sandeen, 2001), increasingly complex (Rhatigan, 2000; Sandeen, 2001), and best understood as professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1976) or organized anarchies (Cohen & March, 1986). The loosely-coupled nature of divisions and the relative autonomy of the professionals who work within them challenge the utility of a forward mapping analytic strategy (Elmore, 1980) as the likelihood of understanding the richness of the implementation process by starting at the top of the organizational chart and moving downward is unlikely to accurately capture the change process. Additionally, though the profession has articulated holistic learning as a core value and collaboration as a key component of achieving this ambiguous goal, scholars critique the profession as focusing substantially less on students' cognitive development and ceding responsibility for the academic and intellectual preparation that occurs within the curriculum to the faculty (Baxter Magolda; 2001; Manning et al., 2006; Woodward et al., 2000). Therefore, the assumption that student affairs professionals will embrace *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) and its focus on holistic learning is uncertain. Finally, the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* within any single division of student affairs is likely to be mediated by its unique organizational context including its history, commitment to collaboration, level of professionalization, training and education of its staff, and myriad other factors.

Organizational Change in Postsecondary Organizations

The literature on organizational change in colleges and universities has grown in breadth and depth over the past 30 of years. In this section I review many of the recurring factors that scholars and reflective leaders identify as significantly influencing change

efforts in postsecondary organizations. Following this overview of the broader literature, I examine the more limited scholarship on implementing organizational change within the context of student affairs.

Factors that Influence Organizational Change Efforts

There is little doubt that leaders and change agents in colleges and universities **face** significant challenges that require an increased ability to implement innovative ideas **and** lead organizational change efforts. Diamond (2002) noted, “The number one issue **facing** higher education today is this: Effectively initiating, implementing, and managing **intentional**, meaningful, planned change” (p. 31). The challenge of achieving successful **change** in postsecondary organizations is exacerbated by the unique features of colleges **and** universities. Kezar (2001) argued that the following organizational characteristics of **Post**secondary institutions must be considered when developing a change model for use **in this** context:

- Interdependent organization
- Relatively independent of environment
- Unique culture of the academy
- Institutional status
- Values-driven
- Multiple power and authority structures
- Loosely coupled system
- Organized anarchical decision-making
- Professional and administrative roles
- Shared governance
- Employee commitment and tenure
- Goal ambiguity
- Image and success

Possibly because change is not a linear process (Bringle & Hatch, 1996; Kezar, 2001; Vaill, 1996), rarely occurs as planned (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kuh, 1996), and is **nearly** always complex (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Hock, 1999), no single

model is likely to capture how change occurs in postsecondary institutions. Because change is a fluid and a messy endeavor, Fullan advised leaders to avoid a checklist approach and instead to embrace the complexity of the process. Consequently, Kezar (2001) encouraged institutional leaders to combine multiple models to guide their efforts, tailored to the unique institutional needs. Likewise, Bolman and Deal (1997), Morgan (1999), and Scott (2002) encouraged leaders and change agents to use multiple frames or lenses to understand how the change process unfolds. Still, some theories have been found to be more applicable than others in making sense of change in postsecondary organizations. Kezar (2002) argued that although there were many ways to conceptualize the change process in higher education and student affairs, the most frequently investigated theories over the last 30 years were cultural, structural and rational theories because they targeted three core areas – values or beliefs, processes, and structure – that were nearly always in need of attention during change efforts unfolding in postsecondary contexts.

Though no single change model will be used to guide this study, a number of emergent factors that cut across myriad change models and studies are important to examine. The following factors emerged across the literature: the influence of senior administrative support; organization-wide leadership and championship; commitment to an inclusive, transparent, and collaborative process; strategic planning; organizational culture; supporting the process through appropriate professional development and sufficient financial resources; and promoting organizational learning.

One of the most consistent findings among scholars studying organizational change within and beyond higher education is the essential role of supportive leadership

in the senior administration (Creamer & Creamer, 1986; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Furst-Bowe & Bauer, 2007; Hunter, 2006; Keller, 2004; Kezar, 2005; Manning et al., 2006; Sandeen, 2001). Senior administrators are individuals in positional leadership roles (e.g., presidents, senior academic officers, senior student affairs officers, deans, and directors) with the ability to direct resources or attention to various change efforts, adjust structures, and encourage collaborative efforts. In her national survey of the development of collaborative relationships between academic affairs and student affairs, Kezar (2003) found that “senior administrative support was by far the most cited strategy for success with 80% saying it was a very successful strategy for creating partnerships” (p. 150). In their case study of the University of Wisconsin – Stout’s application of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance, Furst-Bowe and Bauer (2007) concluded that factors influencing the change process echoed the wider scholarship in the field in that one of the four common components shared by “institutions that have been successful at driving innovation and managing change” (p. 12) was a consistently high level of commitment and support from top leadership throughout the process.

In a broader study, Collins’ rigorous examination of business (2001) and social sector organizations (2005) found that those able to achieve greatness were consistently led by a “Level 5 Leader” who served as an essential building block fueling the ascent of the organization. Collins defined these leaders as “ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the organization, the work – not themselves – and they have the fierce resolve to do whatever it takes to make good on that ambition. A Level 5 leader displays a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (2005, p. 32). Although important, leadership at the top of the administrative structure is rarely enough to ensure

successful change. In his widely read book on leading in a culture of change, Fullan (2001) warned that a charismatic leader was often not a key ingredient to success. Additionally, Bensimon and Neumann (1993) found that team-based leadership within upper administration was generally more effective than a single strong leader when working in complex organizational environments with ambiguous problems. What appears to be true across the literature is that thoughtful leadership and support within the upper administration of postsecondary institutions is frequently viewed as beneficial, even though it may not be enough by itself to ensure success, however it may be defined.

A second frequently cited factor is the essential role of leaders and champions of the change effort throughout the organization (Bringle & Hatch, 1996; Collins, 2001, 2005; Creamer & Creamer, 1986; Handy, 2002; Keller, 2004; Kezar, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Oshry, 1995). In their multi-site case study of institutions embarking on transformative change efforts, Eckel and Kezar (2003) concluded that “transformation occurs when leaders at multiple levels work compatibly” (p. 87). Eckel and Kezar (2003) further stated that widespread involvement was best achieved by inviting the campus community into the process, not by assuming participation develops serendipitously. Likewise, Creamer and Creamer’s (1986) probability of adoption of change model postulated that champions sprinkled throughout the organization were essential in moving the change process forward. Similarly, Bringle and Hatch (1996) found that when implementing service learning initiatives in postsecondary institutions, a small group of committed faculty and staff were essential to the program’s adoption and implementation.

A third consistent finding among many scholars is the importance of a collaborative and inclusive process that takes organizational politics into account and

maintains a heightened commitment to open-communication and transparency in decision-making (Collins, 2005; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Hunter, 2006; Keller, 2004; Kotter, 1996; Kuh, 1996). Reisser and Roper (1999) argued that student affairs organizations were more likely to respond to new initiatives when they were adopted in a collaborative atmosphere rather than by a small group of administrators at the top of the organization. Kotter (1996) pressed leaders to develop a guiding coalition and Woodward, Love, and Komives (2000) urged a deep commitment to inclusivity and civility. Kezar's (2001) analysis of the literature on organization change led her to encourage leaders and change agents to develop alliances and coalitions guided by a deep awareness of the political organizational realities including any preexisting conflicts, competing motivations, and historical power struggles. Kezar (2001) wrote that "empowerment approaches can be used to try to ensure that changes treat people equitably" (p. 116). Regardless of the advice or the model, scholars appear to agree that change initiatives are generally more effective when the process happens with the individuals in the organization rather than happening to them.

A fourth theme is the importance of maintaining an institution-wide commitment to rigorous strategic planning (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Collins, 2005; Dooris, Kelley, & Trainer, 2004; Furst-Bowe & Bauer, 2007; Hunter, 2006; White & Glickman, 2007). In his in-depth case study of Elon University, an institution that transformed from non-descript to outstanding in reputation and educational quality, Keller (2004) concluded that a deep institutional commitment to strategic planning was central to Elon's transformational process. Woodward, Love, and Komives (2000) added, "Managers, especially student affairs managers, can make things happen by pursuing priorities in a

planned way, thinking and acting strategically to implement plans, and making adjustments based on changing conditions” (p. 69). The important point made by these scholars was that a commitment to strategic planning can be a powerful tool to help organizations listen to their constituencies, encourage the emergence of good ideas, recognize opportunities, make decisions, and strive towards a share mission. As Woodward, Love, and Komives (2000) noted, any plan must remain flexible enough to take into account shifts in external or internal needs and allow for adjustments along the way. Finally, though strategic planning is often hailed as central to many successful change efforts, some critics question its actual impact (Birnbaum, 2000) and even its proponents concede the lack of empirical support of its effectiveness (Dooris, Kelley, & Trainer, 2004).

A fifth consistent factor that emerged in the literature is the central role of culture as a key mediator affecting change efforts within postsecondary organizations (Claar & Cuyjet, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Hunter, 2006; Kezar, 2001; Kuh, 1996; Reisser & Roper, 1999; Sandeen; 2001). Lick (2002) defined culture as, “From a change perspective, the culture reflects the interrelationships of shared assumptions, beliefs and values, and behaviors that are acquired over time by its members” (p. 30). In a chapter on leading change in the handbook of administrative leadership, Diamond (2002) identified organizational culture as one of four primary barriers to achieving change in postsecondary environments. Kotter (1996) agreed, arguing that change efforts could only be effective if rooted in the current culture of the organization. Similarly, Fullan believed that leaders must focus attention on reculturing organizations if change is going to be sustained. Kezar and Eckel provided empirical support for these assertions in their

multi-site case study of change efforts within three different postsecondary organizations. They concluded that if the culture of an organization was ignored when applying a generic change strategy, the effort was rarely successful. Kezar and Eckel advised leaders to develop an increasingly nuanced understanding of the culture and significant subcultures of their institution prior to developing and implementing a change strategy so that it might be appropriately tailored to the setting.

Locke and Guglielmino (2006) added to the empirical support for the significant influence of culture in mediating organizational change efforts. They found that in community college settings, each subculture experienced the change process differently. As a result, the authors encouraged leaders and change agents to factor into the planning process how change efforts would be perceived across subcultures. Locke and Guglielmino's advice was similar to Kuh's (1996) recommendation to tailor change initiatives focused on promoting student learning to the student culture on the specific campus where the initiative was being implemented. Kuh warned, "Even the most ambitious, elegantly designed institutional renewal strategy will fall short because students themselves determine the social contexts in which learning occurs" (p. 141). What each of these scholars (Diamond, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kuh; Locke & Guglielmino) reminds leaders is that any change effort that ignores the unique culture and significant subcultures of an institution when developing and implementing a strategy will likely experience increased resistance and less success if approach and strategy are not tailored with the culture in mind.

A sixth factor that emerged in the organizational change literature is the importance of providing appropriate and sufficient support to those in the organization

charged with implementing change initiatives. Two key areas of need shared by faculty and staff responsible for implementation efforts were access to appropriate training and professional development opportunities to prepare for their new roles (Diamond, 2002; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Keller, 2004; Kezar, 2003; Sandeen, 2001) and having the appropriate financial and human resources to implement new initiatives (Claar & Cuyjet, 2000; Diamond; Eckel & Kezar; Keller; Sandeen).

Sandeen (2001) believed that leaders and change agents must carefully consider the professional background, values, knowledge, and abilities of the current staff when embarking on a change process. Diamond (2002) concurred, stating that change efforts were often hindered by a knowledge barrier because faculty and administrators frequently resisted new roles and responsibilities that they felt unprepared to fill. To overcome this barrier, Diamond recommended leaders focus attention on ramping up professional development for current staff. This suggestion was shared by Eckel and Kezar (2003) who found in their multi-site case study that significant attention to providing appropriate staff development was one of five core strategies used by colleges and universities that were successfully transformed.

In addition to preparing individuals in the organization for new roles and responsibilities, leaders and change agents must rally sufficient financial support for change initiatives (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Claar & Cuyjet, 2000; Diamond, 2002; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Keller, 2004; Sandeen, 2001). Ausiello and Wells advised that when implementing new technologies in student affairs, “perhaps one of the most critical tasks... is the identification of fiscal resources to support new initiatives” (p. 73). Diamond warned that if financial resources were not available to implement new

initiatives, the process was likely to unravel. Keller found that one of the key factors in Elon's transformation was its financial acumen through the change process, writing, "Elon has been both daring and inventive yet prudent and scrupulous. It has leveraged its limited funds with remarkable skill" (p. 103). Though often overlooked in many change models, the advice of postsecondary leaders is filled with exhortations of the central role of providing sufficient financial support whether via incentives to key organizational actors or ample funding of the initiative itself (Diamond; Sandeen). Indeed, sufficient financial support has a dual purpose: it provides symbolic support for the initiative and removes a significant barrier in the implementation process.

The seventh factor discerned from the literature is the importance of promoting both single- and double-loop learning throughout the organization (Boyce, 2003; Collins, 2001; 2005; Fullan, 2001; Keller, 2004; Kuh, 1996; Kotter, 1996; Senge, 2000). Single-loop learning is associated with first order or incremental change whereas double-loop learning is often synonymous with second order or transformative change. Single-loop learning leads to organizations doing what they already do better. Double-loop learning may lead to organizational transformation, a process that although rare within postsecondary organizations (Eckek & Kezar, 2003) may be necessary if *Learning Reconsidered* is going to be implemented.

Organizational learning is promoted when there is rigorous assessment to guide decision-making (Furst-Bowe & Bauer, 2007; Keller, 2004), when team-based leadership approaches are embraced (Bensimon & Neumann, 1994), when senior staff model learning-focused behaviors and critical reflection (Ausiello & Wells, 1997), when collaborative decision-making processes are employed (Collins, 2001, 2005; Kotter,

1996), when risk-taking is promoted and supported (Kezar, 2001), and when individuals communicate within and beyond the organization to develop and share new ideas and best practices (Diamond, 2002; Hunter, 2006). Wheatley (1999) wrote that “the system needs to learn more about itself” if change is going to unfold (p. 145). Diamond (2002) added that organizations must learn from others by promoting a “climate that investigates what others are doing, keeps up with the literature, and before any initiative begins, makes you aware of what exists elsewhere” (p. 471). Collins (2005) however warned that educational organizations were frequently impeded by a culture of niceness that “inhibit(ed) candor about the brutal facts,” thereby discouraging the honest conversations needed to promote change efforts (p. 32). In general, though organizational learning will occur in varying ways based on organizational history, culture, and norms of the setting, scholars agree that leaders should work to increase learning capacity throughout the organization in support of change and implementation efforts.

In the preceding review of the literature on organizational change a number of factors believed to influence the implementation of change initiatives were highlighted: senior administrative support; organization-wide leadership and championship; commitment to an inclusive, transparent, and collaborative process; incorporation of strategic planning; recognition of the unique organizational culture; incorporation of professional development and providing sufficient financial resources; and promoting organizational learning. Though far from exhaustive, this list helps focus attention on certain aspects of the change process without limiting other factors that emerge as salient in any given context.

Implementing Change in Student Affairs

Although there is a large body of literature on organizational change in postsecondary organizations writ large (Kezar, 2001), there has historically been significantly less scholarship examining how change initiatives unfold in divisions of student affairs (Creamer & Creamer, 1986; Kezar, 2003). Most common within the early waves of student affairs literature on leadership and change were reflections and war stories from vice presidents and other leaders that were, with few exceptions (e.g., Appleton, Briggs, & Rhatigan, 1978), rarely empirically grounded or supported by theories of organizational change (Creamer & Creamer, 1986). Additionally, early scholarship rarely considered how change unfolded from perspectives beyond senior student affairs officers and, consequently, seldom painted a robust picture of the process.

Another early strand of literature introduced and applied change models from management and organizational development to student affairs but often did so without regard to the unique attributes of student affairs organizations. This literature used secondary research analysis to introduce planned change to student affairs practitioners with the goal of increasing organizational effectiveness (Aery & Moore, 1972; Priest, 1980). Even when student affairs administrators incorporated planned change models into their practice, implementation efforts often stalled or failed. Studies of planned change shed little light on why implementation efforts were or were not successful, particularly salient information that future leaders and change agents might find useful.

Although early literature provided ample viewpoints on how change and implementation efforts were expected to occur, there was still no empirically derived student affairs change model available to guide practitioner decision-making. To fill this

gap Creamer and Creamer (1986) developed the Probability of Adoption Change (PAC) Model using a small scale national survey of senior student affairs officers who had recently managed a change effort in their organization. The authors wrote, “The PAC model was offered first in 1986 as a theoretical paradigm for explaining the likelihood of successful adoption of planned change efforts in student affairs” (Creamer, Creamer, & Ford, 1991, p. 31). The scholars tested and revised the model in subsequent studies applying it to a series of student affairs case studies (Creamer & Creamer, 1988) and then curriculum-reform efforts that bridged academic and student affairs partnerships (Creamer & Creamer, 1989; Creamer, Creamer, & Ford, 1991). Their research marked the first time that empirical studies were used to examine organizational change or policy implementation efforts in student affairs. Creamer, Creamer, and Ford (1991) concluded that seven constructs influenced the likelihood of adopting change including the circumstances under which the change took place, value compatibility, idea comprehensibility, practicality, “superintendency” of the change, championship, advantage probability strategies, and the amount of opposition to planned change. One obvious weakness of this model was its lack of attention to the perspectives of mid- and entry-level student affairs administrators whose support is crucial to programmatic implementation. Understanding mid-level professionals’ perspectives of which factors influenced change efforts is particularly important as most new programs and policies are ultimately implemented by staff in those positions; as a result of its focus on senior leaders, Creamer and Creamer’s model has only modest utility.

Following Creamer, Creamer and Ford’s (1991) research on the adoption of organizational change, the literature returned to practitioners providing recommendations

gleaned from personal experience or scholars applying literature borrowed from neighboring fields to illuminate how change occurred in student affairs. An example of this was Pope's (1993) use of organizational development literature to create a change model to guide divisions of student affairs towards becoming multicultural organizations. Pope's application of organizational development literature onto student affairs organizations remained merely a proposal as she stopped short of testing her theory empirically. Similarly, Kotter (1995) proposed a philosophical framework for decision-making during student affairs restructuring but also failed to test her theory empirically. Like many scholars before her, Kotter examined the change process from the perspective of those at the top of the organization rather than those responsible for implementing new policies and programs. These scholars were just two of many over the past two decades (e.g. Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Sandeen, 2001) who proposed various change strategies that assumed the implementation of new policies or programs was able to be directed from the top of the division of student affairs. These perspectives appeared to ignore Clark's (1983) finding that organizations such as divisions of student affairs were generally regarded as loosely coupled and therefore, by their nature, changed and adapted in a chaotic manner. Clark's (1983) conceptualization of postsecondary organizations as loosely-coupled supports the use of research methods that capture and explain the factors that impact the implementation process from the perspectives of individuals responsible for their actualization, not just those responsible for their bureaucratic adoption.

Over the past ten years, scholars in student affairs began to consider the role of meaning making among participants during periods of organizational change. Ward and Warner (1996) were two of the earliest scholars to posit that change within student affairs

organizations was a cognitive and affective process. They used an informal case analysis and a review of the broader change literature to propose that change often failed because of “fear” in student affairs organizations. Ward and Warner (1996) stated that change was often initiated from the top with too little concern for how the process was perceived by those at all levels of the organization. They argued successful organizational change required leaders and change agents to focus on supporting individual change, managing meaning making, communicating transparently and consistently throughout the process, breaking down artificial organizational barriers, and empowering organizational actors to participate in the change process. Ward and Warner’s (1996) overarching message was that leaders must focus their energies on managing the fear that often permeated student affairs organizations when change initiatives were introduced. Their conclusions have been supported by recent scholars who noted the importance of managing meaning making (Manning, 2001) and assessing and negotiating collective organizational attitude (Dalton & Gardner, 2002) during periods of planned change.

Since the mid-1990s a flurry of scholarship emerged seeking to illuminate how divisions of student affairs implement change (Allen & Cherrey, 2003; Doyle, 2004; Hunter, 2006; Keeling et al., 2007; Kezar, 2003; Kuh, 1996; Smith & Rogers, 2005; Woodward et al., 2000). Among the most influential of the models was Kuh’s “guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments” (p. 136) released in support of *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994). Kuh’s six key change principles were based on the unique organizational nature of divisions of student affairs: (1) Generate enthusiasm for institutional renewal; (2) create a common vision for learning; (3) develop

a common language; (4) foster collaboration and cross-functional dialogue; (5) examine the influence of student cultures on student learning; and (6) focus on systemic change.

Though Kuh (1996) did not test his principles empirically, Kezar (2003) examined them along with two additional models, planned change and restructuring, in a national survey exploring the utility of using three different change models during periods of increased collaboration between academic and student affairs. Kezar's (2003) study was a significant step forward in the methodological quality of research on organizational change in student affairs. She found that institutions combining elements of multiple change models experienced more success than institutions that used any single model. Additionally, Kezar (2003) found that "senior administrative support was viewed as the number one strategy for creating change" (p. 153), and that promoting cross-institutional dialogue, generating enthusiasm, creating a common vision, and providing ample staff development were important factors in the successfully implementing collaborative partnerships among student affairs staff and faculty. Although her conclusions indicated that senior administrative support was essential, respondents in her study also stated the importance of engaging staff at all levels of the organization in the process while providing them the necessary preparation to implement the change.

Summary of the Literature

This literature review served several purposes. I began by situating the study in a historical and scholarly context by highlighting what researchers understand to be the impact of national reports on postsecondary organizations and the possible reasons for their influence. The scholarship was inconclusive on the extent of the impact of national

reports on colleges and universities in inducing organizational change. Second, I provided an overview of the organizational nature of divisions of student affairs, drawing attention to the unique history, culture, and characteristics of student affairs organizations including significant variations in structure and the nature of their work across institutional contexts. Third, I discussed a number of factors that emerged in the broader change literature as influencing organizational change efforts. A particularly important conclusion emerging from this review was that scholars are in general agreement that change is a complex endeavor that rarely unfolds as planned. Consequently, the use of multiple models by leaders and change agents was almost universally encouraged. I concluded my review of the literature with a discussion of the limited scholarship examining organizational change and implementation within the specific context of student affairs.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this study I used a multi-site case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) and employed a backward mapping analytic technique (Elmore, 1980, 1982) to explore how three divisions of student affairs that adopted *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) implemented its recommendations. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What was the implementation process employed by institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*?
2. At institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*, what factors influenced the implementation of the recommended policies and practices?
3. What were the roles and responsibilities of actors within and beyond the division of student affairs in the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*?
4. What organizational levers, if any, were employed to influence implementation?

A qualitative, multi-site case study methodology was the appropriate approach for numerous reasons (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). First, case study methodology is typically used to study the implementation process in organizational settings because it is the primary approach that allows for the simultaneous examination of the role of structures, culture, organization-wide processes, history, and myriad other conditions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988). Second, Merriam (1988) argued that case study methodology was particularly appropriate when a “bounded system can be identified as the focus of the investigation” (p. 9). In this study,

the bounded system was the implementation process of *Learning Reconsidered* by three divisions of student affairs following its adoption. Third, Yin (2003) wrote that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon” (p. 1). Yin’s (2003) description aptly describes this study, specifically my focus on exploring how *Learning Reconsidered* was implemented in divisions of student affairs and how and why the implementation process unfolded as it did.

Though implementation and change studies in higher education and student affairs often employ case study design, they differ from my study because they frequently used a forward mapping analytical approach (Bringle & Hatch, 1996; Creamer & Creamer, 1986, 1988, 1989; Gallant & Drinan, 2006). Most studies also contained the embedded assumption that organizations were a barrier rather than an instrument to be “capitalized upon or modified” during the implementation process (Elmore, 1980, 1982). Possibly because of this assumption, researchers almost universally examined the implementation process through the lens of those at the top of the organization rather than mid- and entry-level staff who were likely responsible for implementing the programs and policies after their adoption (Creamer, Creamer, & Ford, 1991). Elmore (1980, 1982) referred to this type of analytic strategy, the most common among implementation researchers, as forward mapping. Elmore (1980) argued that forward mapping had a number of significant limitations, including its “implicit and unquestioned assumption that policymakers control the organizational, political, and technological processes that affect implementation” (p. 603). These assumptions are particularly troublesome for postsecondary scholars because colleges and universities are only moderately hierarchical

(Kezar, 2001; Kuh, 2000) and often loosely-coupled (Clark, 1983). Because of these organizational characteristics, leaders rarely have enough centralized power to ensure adopted policies and practices will be implemented throughout the organization (Creamer & Creamer, 1986). In essence, the use of backward mapping as an analytic technique disavows the inappropriate assumption that senior student affairs officers control the implementation process and instead assumes that those at the top of the organization must view their role as selective interveners in a “dispersed and decentralized process” (Elmore, 1980, p. 605). With the goal of providing administrators, leaders, and change agents with increasingly nuanced insight and practical recommendations that account for the unique organizational nature of postsecondary institutions, I employed a backward mapping analytical strategy (Elmore, 1980, 1982) to present a ground-view vantage point of how *Learning Reconsidered* was implemented and the factors, actors, and levers that influenced the process across three divisions of student affairs.

Sampling Strategy

There are approximately 4,000 postsecondary institutions in the United States (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2008). Each one of these colleges and universities employ student affairs professionals that provide services and support to undergraduate and graduate students (Creamer, Winston, & Miller, 2001; Hirt, 2006; Manning et al., 2006; Sandeen, 2001). Although organizational arrangements vary (Manning et al., 2006), institutions generally have a senior student affairs officer responsible for the coordination of programs and services with the title of vice president, dean of students, or the equivalent, mid-level professionals in director level roles, and entry-level professionals (Sandeen, 2001).

To select divisions of student affairs that adopted *Learning Reconsidered* from this diverse pool of institutions, I used a hybrid of snowball and criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Miles and Huberman defined snowball sampling as a process that “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 28) and criterion sampling as a technique that ensures that each case matches a specific criteria. In this study, the primary criterion for inclusion was that each division of student affairs must have adopted and implemented *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). The secondary criterion for inclusion in the study was that each of the three divisions of student affairs selected had to be in a mid-sized postsecondary institution such as a research intensive or comprehensive college or university. Scholars have noted significant variation in the structure, culture, and services offered in divisions of student affairs across diverse institutional types (Hirt, 2006; Manning, et al., 2006).

By limiting my sample to divisions of student affairs located in institutions of similar size and type, I minimized the likelihood of including vastly dissimilar organizational environments that would further complicate cross-case analysis of the implementation process (Patton, 1990). Second, based upon an initial review of the adopting divisions of student affairs highlighted in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (ACPA et al., 2006), those embedded within mid-sized institutions appeared more likely to adopt *Learning Reconsidered* than divisions within other institutional types such as small colleges, which by their nature have historically employed many of the key ideas and recommendations forwarded in the document (Hirt, 2006; Schuman, 2005; Westfall, 2006).

My sample selection was eased in part because of the inclusion of a number of information rich cases in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (ACPA et al., 2006) and on the *Learning Reconsidered* website (ACPA, ACUHO-I, ACUI, NACA, NACADA, NASPA, & NIRSA, 2007), both of which documented divisions of student affairs that adopted and implemented *Learning Reconsidered* between 2004 and 2008. I added to the initial list by including divisions that attended the *Learning Reconsidered* Institute, a workshop sponsored by ACPA and NASPA in June 2007 to support institutions with implementation efforts and also by contacting the authors of *Learning Reconsidered* and members of the governing boards of ACPA and NASPA to solicit their recommendations of additional information rich cases.

In summary, I began by developing a list of possible sites for this study by reviewing the divisions of student affairs documented in *Learning Reconsidered 2* and the *Learning Reconsidered* website as having put the document into practice. Additionally, I issued a call for recommendations via email from the board members of ACPA and NASPA, the authors of *Learning Reconsidered*, and numerous senior student affairs officers. This sampling process resulted in a list of eleven divisions of student affairs that met the appropriate criteria. I then contacted the senior student affairs officer at each of the eleven institutions to confirm that their division had adopted and implemented *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). Once confirmed, I spoke via phone with each to share an overview of the study and asked if they were willing to serve as a site for data collection. Four divisions of student affairs agreed to participate in the study, one of which was used to pilot the interview protocol. Descriptions of each of

the three divisions of student affairs and the geographically diverse comprehensive or research intensive universities in which they are nested are detailed in Chapter Four.

Data Collection

This study used individual and small group interviews and document analysis to develop a backwards map of the implementation process (Elmore, 1980, 1982). The use of a variety of data collection methods (i.e., interviews, review of documents, and analysis of online materials) provided multiple avenues through which I was able to examine the informal interactions, relationships, and factors embedded within the organizational hierarchy that affected the implementation process (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990, 2002).

Individual and small group interviews were used to collect data as well as determine what additional information was needed to complete the study and who should be interviewed to obtain it. My initial contact at each institution was the senior student affairs officer who provided me a list of key individuals responsible for implementing *Learning Reconsidered*. Once I received the initial list I then contacted each of the individuals, provided an overview of the study, set a time to interview them, and asked whom else they would recommend that I interview within or beyond the division of student affairs. As a result, I interviewed entry-level, mid-level, and senior student affairs professionals on each campus as well as faculty and academic administrators with insight into the implementation process. Including individuals at all levels of the student affairs division was consistent with backward mapping (Elmore, 1980, 1982), which holds the assumption that “it is not the policy or policymaker that solves the problem, but someone with immediate proximity” (Elmore, 1980, p. 612). Semi-structured small group and

individual interviews were conducted in settings considered private, safe, and comfortable by the participants in order to increase their likelihood of sharing honest perceptions and feelings of what factors influenced successful implementation. I maintained detailed field notes during the interviews, noting in particular participants' perceptions of factors they felt were responsible for the successful implementation. Additionally, each interview was recorded and transcribed to allow for future analysis except in the case of those participants who requested not to be recorded. Each interview began with an explanation of the goal of the research project to provide the interviewee a context for the questions.

In summary, in order to gain multiple perspectives of the implementation process, I conducted 50 individual and small group interviews with 85 individuals interviews from within and beyond each of the three different divisions of student affairs using a semi-structured interview protocol. I began by interviewing student affairs professionals noted by the senior student affairs officer as directly responsible for the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*. Initial interviews led to additional interviews (Elmore, 1980, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) until saturation and sufficiency were achieved (Seidman, 1991) and a robust understanding of the implementation process was gained. Seidman described saturation as “sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experience of those in it” (p. 45) and saturation as “the point in the study at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported. He or she is no longer learning anything new” (p. 45). As such, once I was no longer gaining new insights and begin to consistently hear repetitive information I ceased

interviewing additional participants. The interview transcriptions totaled over 600 pages of data.

In addition to collecting interview data, I reviewed available documents such as emails, planning notes, meeting minutes, strategic plans, websites, and the working notes of individuals responsible for implementing *Learning Reconsidered*. These documents provided additional insight into the institutions, student affairs divisions, factors that influenced implementation, how these factors were navigated, and which actors within and beyond the division of student affairs were influential during the implementation process. Such insights were used to adjust interview questions and determine which additional individuals should be interviewed. In addition, by collecting and analyzing various documents I was able to triangulate data to test for inconsistencies in my emerging understanding of the implementation process (Patton, 2002).

Analytical Strategy

Consistent with qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002) and a backward mapping analytical strategy (Elmore, 1980, 1982), data analysis was ongoing throughout the study, uncovering additional key individuals and units that influenced implementation and guiding my data collection. Though analysis began at the outset of the data collection process and was ongoing, a secondary level of analysis consistent with case study methodology (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002) began after data collection was completed. Interviews were analyzed and compared within each organizational setting to determine which factors and actors were particularly influential throughout the implementation process (Merriam, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994;

Patton, 2002). Additionally, organizational documents were used to triangulate the data (Merriam, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Following the assemblage of the raw case data, I constructed individual case records, a map of the implementation process, and a case narrative of the implementation process of *Learning Reconsidered* for each division of student affairs (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (2002) noted that the quality of analysis in a case study rests upon carefully and systematically “organizing the data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison” (p. 447). Following the development of each case narrative, one participant with a broad perspective of the implementation effort was asked to read and provide feedback on the case. Additionally, a peer debriefer reviewed numerous interview transcripts from each institution and the associated case narrative and then discussed the case with me to challenge assumptions and ensure accuracy. Cases were revised where appropriate when inconsistencies between the case and the perspective of the participant or peer debriefer occurred. Once individual case narratives were completed, reviewed, and revised, I engaged in an inductive analytical process beginning by open-coding each case. I then moved into pattern-coding to sift through, combine, reduce and interpret the data to uncover patterns or regularities (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, I compared emergent patterns and regularities of the implementation process across cases (Merriam, 1988). Finally, a case analysis meeting guided by the research questions was conducted with the peer debriefer to evaluate the cross-case analysis and consider alternative perspectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002) in this study was established at the levels of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. During data collection I systematically documented all individual interviews using a digital recorder, maintained detailed field notes, and then transcribed the interviews verbatim for analysis. Interviews with participants within and beyond the division of student affairs were conducted until saturation and sufficiency were achieved (Seidman, 1991). In addition, documents were systematically reviewed and analyzed. Triangulation (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995), a measure of quality in qualitative research, was achieved by comparing multiple sources of data including the use of various formal and informal documents and interviews with individuals throughout the division of student affairs and the wider institution.

To ensure trustworthiness at the level of analysis I incorporated a peer debriefer (Merriam, 1990; Patton, 2002) to provide an additional perspective to make sense of how the implementation process unfolded and encourage alternative explanations beyond merely those I saw. Additionally, following the development of each case description, participants were asked to review and comment upon their perceptions of the accuracy of the facts described in each case (Patton). At the level of interpretation I employed the peer debriefer (Merriam; Patton) to review and critique the interpretations of the case descriptions.

Finally, because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative scholarship (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002), it is important to discuss the experience, perspective and training that I brought to the study (Creswell; Patton). I have worked in a number of diverse postsecondary institutions in regions throughout the

United States, primarily as a student affairs professional, for the past ten years. My education and training has been in educational policy, college student personnel, and higher education administration. I took coursework on and engaged in a few small to mid-scale qualitative research projects over the past four years including a case study of organizational change in a postsecondary setting prior to beginning this study. I believe strongly that divisions of student affairs should focus their attention and resources on developing policies and practices that promote holistic student learning that are connected to the mission of the institution in which the divisions are nested. Finally, I played no role in the development or dissemination of *Learning Reconsidered* and did not conduct this study at a college or university in which I was enrolled as a student or employed in any capacity.

Overview of the Case Studies

In chapters four, five and six I present a case narrative for each of the three divisions of student affairs examined in this study: Eastern State University, Pioneer State University, and High Plains University. Although the cases were selected to fit similar criteria (i.e., nested in a research intensive university or comprehensive college and noted as having implemented *Learning Reconsidered*), each organization varied significantly in how they put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Consequently, the cases are presented separately and intact to capture the unique implementation process that unfolded at each institution. The case narratives include an overview of the institutional setting, a portrait of the division of student affairs, and a description of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* that incorporates the perspectives of myriad individuals within and beyond the division of student affairs. In the final chapter I provide an analysis across the three

cases and then discuss overarching findings that emerged, the relationship of the findings to current literature, and implications that stem from the findings. I conclude the final chapter by presenting a metaphor that captures the implementation process and discuss implications for practice and research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Eastern State University

Learning Reconsidered was first introduced at Eastern State University [ESU] in the midst of several ongoing initiatives to transform the institution, key staff departures, changes to the organizational structure of a young division of student affairs, and under new Vice Presidential leadership. The dedicated, “technically competent,” and moderately professionalized student affairs staff greeted its arrival with a mix of excitement, resentment, interest, and a high degree of uncertainty about its utility in their daily work. Among the three institutions examined in this study, Eastern State University was the most recent adopter and their short timeline meant that the initial iteration of the implementation process was closer to the beginning than to the end. Although the outcome of the process remains unclear, what is known is that nine months after its initial wide-scale introduction and subsequent adoption, the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* continues to unfold throughout the institution and division in myriad ways and along multiple tracks. This case study begins with an overview of Eastern State University, moves to a description of the relatively young division of student affairs, and then describes the three tracks – cabinet-level, centralized student affairs, and department-level – via which *Learning Reconsidered* was being implemented.

Institutional Overview

Eastern State University opened its doors in the 1920s as a state normal college. Although the university has maintained its commitment to preparing future educators, the original institutional mission and the range of academic programs available have expanded significantly over the past 90 years. Current students can pursue degrees in 57

undergraduate majors including well-regarded programs in engineering, business, education, and communication or as an advanced student in the growing graduate school. At the start of the 2008 academic year the campus served nearly 10,000 students from throughout the state and region. Today the typical admitted ESU undergraduate has higher test scores and high school grade point average than earlier cohorts, is between the ages of 18 and 22, is likely to live in a residence hall during their first year, and is increasingly involved with campus life.

Eastern State University is a campus in the midst of significant transition. In addition to expanded academic programs and changing student demographics ESU has experienced a significant turnover among the faculty with 55% new to the institution over the past ten years. Along with an evolving faculty the administration has undergone a significant shift from being primarily “indigenous administrators” to being populated by mid- and upper-level administrators who possess significant experience outside the institution. Included in this shift away from home grown administrators are the vice presidents that populate the President’s leadership team. The cabinet has completely turned over in the past two and a half years, is filled entirely by external hires, and maintains a stated commitment to implementing a change agenda. The Vice President for Student Affairs described her cabinet-level colleagues’ attraction to ESU in the following manner:

The President likes to quote the book *Good to Great*. How do we get from good to great? That is what we came here to do. We didn’t come in here just to be good, to take it to the next level. Or else, some of us wouldn’t have come.

Actually, I think most of us wouldn’t have come.

The numerous ongoing initiatives at ESU are fueled by a 100-million dollar gift received fifteen years earlier to transform the institution from a regional teachers' college to a comprehensive university. As the Special Assistant to the President and former Interim Provost noted:

I think in my early years we reacted to change and change didn't come all that often. But it seemed as soon as we got that gift of 100-million change is just an everyday thing here. And we try not to be as much reactive as proactive and take advantage of opportunities that we see that could come in the future and trying to be very responsive to meet the current needs of students.

During an early September morning in 2008, a visitor walking across the compact campus of Eastern State University would quickly notice the dramatic changes underway to the physical plant as recently poured sidewalks dry and final touches are put on landscaping surrounding a new science building and renovated library. Just as Eastern State University is sprucing up its campus with new buildings and landscaping, the surrounding town is undergoing a transformation of its own. On the southern edge of campus, three city blocks that were previously occupied by single family homes and apartments are in the midst of being demolished to make way for a new hotel, bookstore, upscale condos, student apartments, a coffee shop, and other retail outlets. The downtown renewal project is expected to create a college town feel that will cater to the needs of the increasingly residential student population. As one member of the campus community commented about the flurry of building on and around campus, "We drove to work one way one day and a different way the next day because of the construction. So everything is changing and that makes it an exciting place to be."

Although located just twenty minutes outside of a major metropolitan area on the east coast, the campus and small town in which it is located are described by many as feeling more rural than suburban with many faculty and staff increasingly drawn to living near campus and maintaining friendships outside of work. Campus has long been a place where folks enjoy working, particularly throughout the functional areas that now comprise the division of student affairs. Many on campus, old-timers and new-timers alike, share a sense of excitement about many of the initiatives they see underway and the opportunities they present for the institution and its future. On the other hand, many also feel uneasy about the current changes at the institution and share a common concern that Eastern State University is adrift without a firm sense of its mission and future direction, and might be in danger of “losing its soul” as it continues to transition from a teachers college to a comprehensive research university.

Student Affairs at Eastern State University

The Division of Student Affairs at ESU has existed in its current form for less than 8 years. Prompted by a critical report from an accreditation team, the current President, then new to his position, reorganized the institution with the goal of enhancing the quality of student services and consequently, the Division of Student Affairs was formed. The Assistant to the President recounted:

After a visit by a regional accreditor, some of the comments were that the student affairs side was getting shortchanged. Within that division [Academic and Student Affairs] most of the attention was on academic affairs and student affairs was kind of like a stepchild – budgetary as well as staff as well as programs. And so a decision was made to develop a distinct division of student affairs, fully staffed

with all of the programs needed to provide the appropriate support for a university that was moving forward. So it [the Division of Academic and Student Affairs] broke off into two separate divisions.

The initial organizational structure of the division seven years earlier included a collection of offices, departments, and services that were previously clustered in multiple divisions. The initial functional areas included housing, career and academic planning, student activities, service learning and volunteer programs, campus recreation, the health and counseling centers, and judicial affairs as well as admissions, financial aid, the registrar and oversight of the athletics program. The first vice president had a background in enrollment management and felt significant pressure to increase the quantity and quality of incoming students; he subsequently focused much of his attention on student recruitment and devoted less time to providing hands-on leadership to the rest of the division.

According to many on campus, one outcome of the inaugural vice president's focus on growing and enhancing the quality of the ESU student population was that the collection of departments that were moved into the Division of Student Affairs continued to function as distinct units with new reporting lines but unchanged expectations for how they operated in relationship to one another. Today, student affairs administrators portray their colleagues as hardworking and deeply dedicated to the students and the institution at which they work. Yet, the campus as a whole is also universally described as a place in which collaboration is infrequent, individuals are often protective of their functional areas, offices and individuals work in silos with minimal interaction, and new programs are rare. Although pockets of professional excellence exist throughout the division many

shared that a culture of mediocrity pervades the campus. In describing the current culture of the division and its relationship to the wider campus, the Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs and Director of the Campus Recreation Center and Student Union shared:

The division operates in a 1970s kind of siloed model. So, the culture has been, we really are all doing our own thing. We are doing it really well, but we are doing our own thing. And I think that the academic side doesn't, hasn't known much about what student affairs does. I mean, we are faculty driven at this institution. And again, I think part of it is because student affairs is a relatively new concept, not even 10 years old.

Others noted that the influence of unions throughout the student affairs division was at the core of why many entry- and mid-level administrators focused almost solely on their own tasks while often eschewing opportunities to collaborate and support innovative programs that might necessitate taking on additional work.

With the departure of the first vice president of student affairs in 2005 the Provost assumed responsibility for admissions, financial aid, and the registrar. Following a year-long national search, during which time the long-serving Dean of Students served as the interim vice president, Dr. Charlotte Pippen was selected as the second Vice President of Student Affairs at Eastern State University. She arrived in August of 2007 with a long history of leadership in varied institutional settings. Pippen noted, "I like the diversity of higher education and for me part of the challenge is to see can I practice my craft at different institutional types." Pippen was not alone in being new to ESU. She began her tenure at ESU alongside a cohort of other cabinet members she described as the "we are the change is hard but change is here, the 'don't stop thinking about tomorrow' crew."

As Pippen took stock of her new environment she quickly recognized an opportunity existed at ESU for her to fill a leadership vacuum in the area of developing student learning outcomes at the institution. She recalled:

I found, I learned this from a couple of colleagues, that the accrediting agency in this region – Middle States – has not gotten quite as aggressive about student learning outcomes or program reviews as on the West Coast or in the South. Because there were things that we were required to do on the West Coast that maybe we will be required to do this time in Middle States. So I saw that opportunity to practice [my] craft in another environment. Cause, you know, it is a virtual wasteland. At least on one level, intellectually, people said, you know, this sounds good, we need to be doing something. You know, when you hit the ground though you need, things need to change. And people, some people are not as ready for change as they might say they are.

Although Pippen recognized early the leadership vacuum that existed and the need for implementing learning outcomes, her time and attention during her first year were consumed by student crises or attending to areas of “benign neglect” in student affairs such as the pervasive student culture of alcohol use and abuse. Additionally, during her first semester, Pippen concluded that the student affairs division lacked the type of leadership she believed was needed to implement *Learning Reconsidered*. Pippen shared:

I have a technically competent team. But I don’t have the vision. I don’t have people for the most part, I don’t have people with vision and breadth. So, when I was looking [for a new Associate Vice President], I took time to figure out what I

was going to do to bring someone in. A lot of opportunities fell into my lap – people left, created a slot, moved a slot over someplace else.

The opportunities created by the departure of a few key staff allowed Pippen to make a series of changes in the organization. These included adjusting the position titles of several individuals, shifting the managerial responsibilities of some staff, and hiring two new Associate Vice Presidents. As a result, by the end of her first year Pippen had a team in place that she believed could lead the division forward. However, the multiple changes in the division, in particular the departure of the long-serving Dean of Students who had been the Interim Vice President, left some in the division distrustful of Pippen and many unsure of the direction of student affairs and their role in the process. The Director of the Student Success Center described the current psychological state of the staff in the division:

It has changed a lot in the last year and it is very different than it was the year before... it is difficult to answer because things are still in flux. We don't really know where we are yet... there is so much change going on you don't know what is going to happen the next day, which makes it an exciting place to work. The way it was a year ago and before that it was an absolutely positive place to work. It is fun, it is exciting, it is very secure. People are happy and content, but people are not as happy with the change. It scares people. It's different now, not that that's bad.

By the conclusion of Charlotte Pippen's first semester at ESU the student affairs staff held mixed feelings about the direction of the organization. Emotions ranged from excitement about the possibilities that lay ahead to worry about the direction of the

division to wide-spread frustration about the lack of communication from the Vice President. It was into this milieu that *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced.

Implementing Learning Reconsidered at Eastern State University

The adoption and implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* was spurred at Eastern State University by the hiring of Dr. Charlotte Pippen as the second Vice President of Student Affairs in August 2007. Pippen maintained longstanding involvement with national student affairs organizations including an awareness of recent national reports such as *Learning Reconsidered*. In addition, she believed that all postsecondary institutions needed to increase their focus on student learning outcomes and assessment – key recommendations embedded within *Learning Reconsidered*. She believed that her role at ESU was to “practice her craft” by bringing the division up to speed and moving them into the future. Beyond her commitment to the tenants of *Learning Reconsidered*, she was also driven by her past experiences at colleges in the South and West that had been pushed by accrediting bodies to increase their focus on developing and assessing student learning outcomes. Even though the regional accrediting body of her current institution had yet to focus its attention on promoting learning outcomes and assessment, Pippen felt that it was better to get “ahead of the curve” than be in the position of responding to a critical accreditation report.

At Eastern State University the implementation process unfolded along three simultaneous and sometimes overlapping tracks. Each of the three tracks shared a common starting point in the NASPA Institute, a division-wide professional development conference that occurred in January of 2008. The first implementation track included the Vice President’s efforts to increase awareness of and appreciation for learning outcomes

among the cabinet and President. The second track was along a centralized route that cut across the Division of Student Affairs and focused on introducing the concepts in *Learning Reconsidered* (i.e., learning outcomes and assessment), promoting their adoption, ramping up the knowledge and skills among the staff to successfully implement learning outcomes, and fueling implementation across the division. The department-level process, the third implementation track, was closely connected to the centralized track but unfolded in a generally decentralized manner and was mediated by the directors and other key mid-level administrators who acted as guides in each department. The final section of this case will begin with an overview of the NASPA Institute and then review how implementation unfolded along each of the three tracks beginning with the cabinet-level, moving to the centralized track, and concluding with the department-level process.

Kick Starting Implementation

Learning Reconsidered first received significant attention at Eastern State University during a division-wide student affairs professional development program six months after Dr. Pippen arrived on campus. The NASPA Institute, an intensive five-day on-campus program initially developed for community colleges, was brought by the Vice President to ESU in response to staff feedback requesting more professional development. The institute covered a wide range of topics including the history of student affairs, legal issues, crisis management, the changing nature of college students, and diversity. Cutting across many of the sessions was an implicit argument for the adoption of learning outcomes as a guiding principle in student affairs. Near the end of the institute a full session was devoted to introducing student learning outcomes using *Learning*

Reconsidered as the basis of the presentation. Charlotte Pippen shared why she employed a centralized professional development program to introduce *Learning Reconsidered*:

So, rather than me standing up there and doing it, we brought in a team of professionals as part of a larger student development initiative so they could see the larger context of the history of higher education. And my intent in doing it that way it was to create an understanding that it was for everybody.

Although the student affairs staff was surveyed about their preferences for professional development topics, little was shared with them about any specific goals or outcomes for the institute beyond the dates and an expectation for their attendance.

Unlike previous professional development initiatives at Eastern State University, Pippen made a conscious decision to invite the entire student affairs staff to attend. She believed that *Learning Reconsidered* was for everybody and reasoned:

I looked at it as an opportunity to give meaning to our work we do beyond the individual doing the work... To give kind of a framework for them to understand why we do what we do and why it is important. What the student gets out of it.

As a result of the open invitation 150 of the 200 student affairs employees attended the NASPA Institute including custodial, physical plant, administrative support, graduate assistants, and the professional staff. Many of the director-level staff, in particular the Assistant to the Vice President, applauded the inclusion of support staff and believed that their involvement was symbolic of the growing importance of learning outcomes at ESU. Other directors however, were less enthusiastic and believed that frontline staff members were ill-equipped to engage in the institute because they lacked an understanding of how the information related to their work. Additionally, the loss of a full week at the precipice

of a busy semester resulted in heightened anxiety among participants at all levels of the organization.

The sense of being overwhelmed during the NASPA Institute was not only because of the timing of the event. Though previously exposed to *Learning Reconsidered* during national conferences and through a series of meetings with his supervisor, an entry-level professional from the Campus Recreation Center noted:

I think this part, with NASPA, was the most overwhelming for me because they gave us so much information that we even commented afterwards that those people that never had the introduction to it must feel worse. So this was definitely, this was overwhelming, completely overwhelming. It's like, ugh, we have to do this now on top of run this building?

A second professional in the student union concurred and articulated his emotional state in his pictorial representation of the implementation process of a desk piled high with projects and paperwork. He described it the following way:

This is a desk... the first thing you do when you sit down at a desk when it is nice and neat and clean is you get a good feeling when you sit down at the desk. Ok, I'm going to have a good day. Everything is nice. I've got a calendar here and you really can't see a calendar right now because when I'm sitting down at this desk of *Learning Reconsidered* at this point I feel overwhelmed because I see everything has basically been thrown on my desk. It's like this is *Learning Reconsidered*, there is really no implementation you just kind of came in one day, maybe after a long vacation, and there is all this stuff piled around your desk and it is all this *Learning Reconsidered* stuff. Ok, if I have to sit here and make sense

of all this stuff. Reorganize it the way I'm going to understand it and I don't even have a clue what half of it is.

In sum, although participation in the NASPA Institute energized some professionals in the division about the possibilities of putting student learning outcomes into practice, many others felt overwhelmed by the idea of making sense of and implementing *Learning Reconsidered* while balancing their ongoing job responsibilities. Complicating matters was that a small but influential group of mid-level professional staff resented the process by which *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced to the division. The Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs noted that he felt that "it got shoved down our throats... [that] this is something we are lacking and this is what the rest of the field is doing so we need to do it."

In addition to staff from the division of student affairs, Pippen also invited key academic affairs staff and faculty from across campus to attend the NASPA Institute. The Assistant to the President recalled:

When she started the educational process for her division from the beginning she included members outside the division...she invited people working on learning outcomes assessment in academic affairs, she invited the people working on the Middle States review team, the regional accrediting body. She invited members of the administration in academic affairs to participate so we were learning at the same time as members of her division were hearing the way things look at other institutions and the way things could look here. And so it automatically built that camaraderie from the beginning. And in all of her initiatives she reached across

the border to make sure she has gotten perspective from stakeholders across campus, not just within her division.

At the conclusion of the institute one of the presenters recommended setting the goal of implementing 1-2 learning outcomes in each department. No other expectations beyond those recommended by the presenter concerning implementation were explicitly shared by the Vice President at that time. Following the conclusion of the institute in early January, Pippen focused the majority of her attention on championing *Learning Reconsidered* along the upper-level track among the cabinet and President.

Implementation at the Cabinet-Level

As noted earlier, the members of the Presidential cabinet at the time of the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* were committed to continuing the evolution of ESU from a regional teachers college to a comprehensive research university. From her cabinet position Charlotte Pippen recognized the opportunity for student affairs to influence the evolution and subsequent enactment of the institutional vision.

Additionally, she believed that student learning outcomes were the key connection between student affairs and the broader institution, and recognized that she needed to attend to simultaneously leading implementation efforts at the cabinet-level as well as within the student affairs division. Pippen shared:

It's a relatively new division, to begin to show, I think a common place, the best way to have a linkage is through student learning outcomes. Because it is important, because then you can develop a common language. A set of common places where you are trying to get students to go, you are just using a different

vehicle for getting them there...I just think the student learning outcomes really, that is the core, that is 'the it' that draws the academy together.

With the goal of drawing student and academic affairs together at ESU, Pippen worked to set a tone of collaboration by building relationships with her academic colleagues. She reflected:

Actually, I spent early on, some people actually thought I spent more time with my academic colleagues, but it was about when you come in as a vice president you gotta set a tone that this is important because otherwise it's the same-old, same-old.

Pippen believed that how she spent her time during the initial months in her position held significant symbolic importance. She also understood that if she was not setting the expectation that collaboration was expected through her actions, then it was unlikely that others in the division would move away from siloization and embrace more collaborative approaches to their work.

In addition to role modeling collaborative behavior for those in student affairs, Charlotte Pippen's position on the cabinet and her decision to focus time and energy on building relationships with the President and her cabinet-level colleagues resulted in her gaining respect and eventually a leadership role beyond student affairs. The Assistant to the President shared:

By virtue of having a seat at the cabinet level she has been able to get buy-in from central administration for the whole concept of the education of the whole student – social and personal development as well as academic development. And so we are getting leadership from top-down and bottom-up. And I think that while the

bottom-up stuff was probably already brewing, once it becomes one of the President's strategic directions it is a whole lot easier getting everyone else on board. And I think Charlotte being in the seat in the conference room helped that happen.

Because of her proximity to the strategic decision-making process and ability to build relationships, trust, and respect with her colleagues on the cabinet, Pippen was able to promote the inclusion of holistic student learning and development and the role of student affairs in the number one point in the draft strategic plan. One way that she was able to achieve this result was by how she brought ideas to the cabinet. The Assistant to the President recalled:

I don't think she met any resistance but she came in and she didn't just come in with, "I have a kernel of a thought." She came in with specific ideas, specific strategies, specific solutions and what always gets the cabinets attention – ways to allocate within her given resources.

Pippen's ability to clearly articulate a plan and implementation strategy using existing financial resources was essential during a period of difficult economic times when resources were relatively tight.

In summary, Pippen's decision to focus significant time on championing the key tenets of *Learning Reconsidered* among the President and cabinet resulted in winning their support, achieving a focus on holistic student learning and development in the strategic plan, and eventually securing additional financial and human resources to bolster implementation efforts in student affairs. However, although Pippen was quite successful in garnering support for the implementation of key recommendations in

Learning Reconsidered across the upper-levels of the administration, a continuing criticism from within her own division was her lack of attention to gaining the support and buy-in from the “academic side” for implementation efforts.

Centralized Student Affairs Implementation

Simultaneous to her efforts during her first year at ESU to secure support for the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* within the cabinet, Pippen also guided the implementation process along a centralized track within the division of student affairs. Pippen fueled implementation along this track by (1) telling her leadership team directly that learning outcomes were important and should be implemented across the division, (2) providing professional development experiences for the staff to introduce them to *Learning Reconsidered* and enhance their ability to implement, (3) hiring two new Associate Vice Presidents and shifting a number of director’s responsibilities to support the effort, (4) placing the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* and learning outcomes as a top goal of the division, and (5) adjusting the year-end staff evaluations to include an assessment of individual implementation efforts.

The Assistant Vice President and Director of the Health Center voiced the importance of Pippen playing a lead role within student affairs implementation efforts:

The central role in all of this was our VP. It would never have happened without her. And this is not the kind of place where a lot of stuff gets done if someone thinks of it that is not in a top-down [position] and that isn’t necessarily a good thing.

Implementation along this track began with Pippen’s unilateral decision to use the NASPA Institute as a lever to introduce *Learning Reconsidered* and continued with her

hiring the Keeling Consulting Group to facilitate a one and a half day workshop over the summer. The intent of the workshop was to provide technical training to support the development of department-level learning outcomes and assessment measures. In contrast to her decision to invite everyone in student affairs to attend the institute, very little else that occurred along the central implementation track was inclusive. This was particularly true of decision-making and planning related to implementation efforts. For example, rather than discussing the merits of adopting *Learning Reconsidered* or how to introduce it division-wide, the director-level staff was informed by Pippen how the process would unfold. The Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs shared:

I guess... that people that were part of a decision-making process maybe aren't any more, and that's certainly caused some problems for those staff...I think what has been problematic for some of the folks here is that maybe not everyone is involved to the extent that they were before in kind of steering or goal setting.

One consequence of the lack of staff involvement in decision-making or planning for implementation was increased frustration among otherwise supportive staff. The Assistant Vice President and Director of the Campus Recreation Center and Student Union noted:

That [lack of attention to planning] is the only thing that is frustrating. We are not taking the time to plan for a lot of this. There has been no discussion, reflection, how do you bring it back to your departments. Who are going to be your departmental representatives that are doing to work with the new Associate Vice President as she comes in in October. If I had to make any criticism as I read and reread *Learning Reconsidered*, it is that planning hasn't occurred, the planning for

change. And it's not just with *Learning Reconsidered*. So, it's a little bit of a shotgun approach. And that doesn't help with staff that aren't used to assessment and evaluation as a common theme. I think every chapter in *Learning Reconsidered 2* talks about planning. You are in for the long-term, you gotta bring people on board, you gotta dedicate resources, you gotta make sure people understand terminology. None of that was done as a division. We didn't even set division goals. There are no division learning outcomes.

Beyond a heightened level of frustration, a second result of the lack of inclusion in decision-making and planning was a decreasing level of trust for Pippen within student affairs.

A second lever used by Pippen to fuel implementation was program reviews. In addition to the Keeling Group providing focused professional development for the division, Pippen hired them during the spring semester to review three under-resourced programs: Housing and Residence Life; the Health Center; and the Counseling Center. Although program reviews were not previously done at ESU, the Vice President believed their incorporation could benefit these departments by (1) drawing attention to the impact of their current resource allocation on their services, and (2) providing expert advice on how to enhance the quality of their programs and services by incorporating learning outcomes. The response within student affairs to the introduction of program reviews was mixed. In sharp contrast to the Director of the Health Center who believed her bump in funding was a result of the review, housing staff felt professionally undermined and disrespected because they first heard about their impending review in a large, public meeting without any prior discussion. The Assistant Director of Residence Life shared,

“Yeah, we found out in an open forum in front of other offices. It was very inappropriate.” In spite of the mixed reviews of staff in regards to how they occurred, Pippen shared, “I think that after some difficulty in the spring, the program review system is proving to yield the desired results.” However, although changes stemming from the review process were underway by the early fall, an undercurrent of distrust and animosity towards the Vice President continued to grow in the division.

A third lever Pippen employed was hiring two new Associate Vice Presidents capable of providing the leadership she believed was necessary to implement *Learning Reconsidered*. Pippen shared:

I need some people who are, I didn’t say this publicly, I needed some ‘Mini-Mes’. I wanted people that had both breadth and depth. What we had here was depth. We didn’t have breadth. So I deliberately went out to look for people that lived in different regions, you know, who had experience in other places... My two new Associate Vice Presidents are an asset because I no longer have to feel like a lone wolf crying out in the wilderness. There were times in the spring, in the fall you are still getting to know people, you get into spring and it gets to be awfully lonely. Basically I recognized I needed some help to be able to try to move this along and that help was not going to come internally cause I needed it at the highest levels of student affairs.

In addition to hiring two new Associate Vice Presidents, Pippen adjusted the titles and responsibilities of a number of continuing director-level staff whom she believed could support her efforts. She commented, “There are some people that actually get it and the people I’m promoting, in addition to the one’s I’ve brought in, are the ones that get it.”

As Pippen's hectic first year at ESU unfolded, her attention was consistently drawn away from implementing *Learning Reconsidered* and towards other priorities and emergent crises. Pippen disclosed:

And then, well, not much happened after that [the NASPA Institute]. We went into program reviews. And then in the summer we brought the Keeling Group in with a smaller group of staff to work specifically on *Learning Reconsidered 2* - the assessment piece. It has been pretty quiet since then which is why these are all disconnected activities.

A number of staff concurred that the ongoing implementation process felt disjointed and voiced concern over what they perceived was a lack of attention to how the division was, or was not, working across their silos to implement *Learning Reconsidered* at the divisional level. Others added that the Vice President had not articulated clear expectations to guide department-level implementation efforts. Additionally, a number of directors shared that *Learning Reconsidered* was rarely, if ever, discussed in student affairs leadership team meetings.

In the middle of the summer Pippen employed two final levers, staff evaluations and goal setting, to refocus the attention of staff on *Learning Reconsidered*. In each instance, the Vice President acted without consulting her leadership team or providing her directors advance warning of upcoming changes. Her leadership style and decision-making process were a significant departure from previous norms in the organization. For many directors, the change from being involved in the decision-making process to learning about significant changes via mass emails resulted in frustration, anxiety, and discomfort in their positions. By the beginning of the fall semester, many departments

remained in a holding pattern as they waited for the arrival of the Associate Vice President for Engagement whom they believed was hired to lead the ongoing implementation effort. The next section of the case will examine how the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* unfolded within three different departments at Eastern State University.

Department-Level Implementation

Similar to the first two implementation tracks discussed, department-level implementation stemmed directly from the NASPA Institute. Even without the Vice President articulating clear expectations or endorsing a specific implementation plan following the institute, multiple student affairs units engaged in efforts to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. The department-level implementation process varied widely across units and in each case was largely guided by the director of the unit. In addition, department-level implementation often unfolded in a relatively decentralized, isolated manner with minimal connection to division-wide efforts. How department-level implementation unfolded will be examined in the following representative units: Judicial Affairs, the Student Success Center, and the Recreation Center.

Judicial Affairs – Sitting back and waiting. The Office of Judicial Affairs at Eastern State University consists of one student affairs professional with the title of Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Judicial Affairs and a part-time graduate assistant. The primary responsibilities of the department include developing and reviewing policies affecting student life, working with components of the Greek system, and administering the student conduct process. The director brought with him ten years of experience in student affairs when he stepped into his current position five years ago. He

stated that he generally agrees with the ideas and recommendations embedded within *Learning Reconsidered* and shared that he had “tried to meld them” with what he believes is central to the role of judicial affairs – to promote student learning. Even though the director believed *Learning Reconsidered* was congruent with his own professional values, he struggled with how it had been introduced, believing *Learning Reconsidered* was “shoved down our throats” resulting in a number of his colleagues feeling “very small” because of the process. He was also unconvinced that the current drive to implement learning outcomes would remain a long-term commitment at ESU. He shared, “I still always have concerns about actually committing to a direction whereas many times I think that it’s just that we’re playing student affairs, not really committing to something.”

Within his own department, the director had yet to develop or implement learning outcomes nine months after their introduction. He shared:

I’m coming from the perspective of basically a one person office is a little more difficult perhaps for me to do something than maybe for a larger office that, with a handful of staff that might be able to dedicate more time to projects and one of them being starting to create learning outcomes.

In addition to having limited time to develop learning outcomes, he was unwilling to commit his limited resources until he had a clear understanding of the expectations and the direction for the division. He explained:

I just don’t think that everybody kind of knows what is going on with regard to *Learning Reconsidered*. I think it’s really just, we are looking for more guidance about these things, you know, what are they supposed to look like... I have never

had conversations with colleagues about what this was all going to do for us. We have kind of fallen short of that... So we have had trainings and I think different offices are doing things to a different degree but I think we just haven't seen the big picture yet. And so I know there is a lot of hope and expectations with the new Associate Vice President. That she is going to pull it together for us.

Even though the director was hesitant to implement learning outcomes, he remained hopeful about their future utility at ESU and articulated that the training and other levers employed by the Vice President were helpful in moving the division, and his department, forward. He shared, "We are certainly committing some resources to learning outcomes, which is certainly a good thing rather than always trying to do more with less."

Student Success Center – Full speed ahead. The Student Success Center at Eastern State University is comprised of a director, assistant director, three professional staff members, and two administrative support staff. The unit's primary functional areas are disability resources, veteran affairs, and the campus tutoring services. Similar to many of their colleagues across campus, the staff is being asked to do more with relatively stable resources. Both the director and assistant director arrived at ESU after working in the non-profit sector where each worked extensively with grant-funded programs. The director explained:

When you come from a different world than higher ed you bring so many other skills and knowledge and when you are using like, I have worked for profit and non-profit, and you are using other people's money you better be assessing and you better be able to prove why you are doing it again.

Although the NASPA Institute marked the director and assistant director's first introduction to *Learning Reconsidered*, they believed right away that it "made sense... it absolutely fit, it just felt like it was different wording [from what we already do]."

In contrast to the minimal time allocated to implementing *Learning Reconsidered* in Judicial Affairs, the staff in the Student Success Center worked diligently to develop learning outcomes and assessment measures immediately after the NASPA Institute. Two factors set the stage for their early implementation efforts. The first factor was the presence of a culture of collaboration in the department. The director shared:

They [other directors] weren't getting the buy in. I think our department was better because we already work as a team and we already do each other's jobs... and we don't have a problem with it. Other departments because of the unions, we have two unions and management in here, and we have not had any issues come up like other departments do with union stuff and all of that. We just work as a team. And we might ask them to do things but we are doing their job too when they need it. So I think our staff had better buy-in.

The second factor was an understanding among the staff that once the director committed to an endeavor, it remained a priority until accomplished. Therefore, the director joked, it was easier to work towards implementation than to listen to her talk daily about the department needing to implement learning outcomes.

Although the culture of the department and the nature of the director provided a foundation, the implementation process in the Student Success Center was enhanced by thoughtful planning led jointly by the director and assistant director and inclusive of the entire staff. In addition, the department benefited from the responsive leadership of the

director and assistant director who paid attention to the emerging needs of individual staff and responded to meet those needs as the process unfolded. The assistant director reflected, "I met with the different staff regarding, we knew that some staff, some of the secretaries... they were intimidated by this. We helped them work through objectives and all that."

Within a week of the NASPA Institute, the entire department met in the cafeteria to follow up on how they should move forward. At this meeting each individual, from the administrative support staff to the director, was given the charge to develop learning outcomes for their primary area of responsibility. In addition, the group spent time brainstorming learning outcomes and assessment measures in order to "get into the practice of it." Following the meeting, the director and assistant director worked one-on-one with individuals in the department. The director recalled:

We met as a group and then individually. You [the Assistant Director] with some of them and then we came up with our learning outcomes. And then we talked about how you are going to assess them. And part of it, for us it was really easy. I think with the secretaries it was next easiest because we gave them a lot of support. And they would say, 'I'm too stupid to do this.' And I would say, 'No, you are not. Look at the work you do here.' So it really turned, I think, into a positive thing. It build their self-esteem... the professional staff was a little more resistant. And I'm not sure why. Actually, I know why, because to them it was oh great it is another thing to do... so they are resistant because they are like, 'How am I going to do more work? And if I come up with these learning outcomes and I

have to assess them how am I going to assess them? Who is going to do it?' And so I think that is the resistance.

Following the institute, the implementation effort remained a central topic during staff meetings and in conversations between the senior leadership and the administrative and professional staff. As challenges arose, appropriate responses were brainstormed by the director and assistant director to move the department forward. For example, additional one-on-one coaching was incorporated to help individual staff make sense of *Learning Reconsidered* and its utility in their daily work. As a result of their collective effort, within three weeks they developed learning outcomes and assessment measures for their core programs that were then emailed to the Vice President for her feedback; the email did not receive a response. Undeterred, the staff spent the remainder of the academic year and the proceeding summer adjusting their outcomes and programs; during their annual August retreat, they discussed *Learning Reconsidered* and how it might continue to influence their work as a unit. In reflecting on the ability of the Student Success Center to implement learning outcomes the director shared, "For us it could work because it makes sense, but for the follow through and for the whole division to do that it can't happen without trust."

Student Recreation Center – Trying to find time to learn. The Recreation Center at Eastern State University was built 17 years earlier and since that time has developed a reputation among its professional and student staff as being a great place to work. Patti Sola, an assistant director, shared, "I would say from since I first started I always felt like the rec center was our own little oasis." Having grown over the past two decades, the unit is currently staffed by four professionals, an administrative assistant, and numerous

graduate and undergraduate students. The fast-paced work environment became even more hectic in December 2007 with the retirement of the long-serving administrative assistant, an assistant director away on maternity leave, and the departure of the director. The Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs, and then interim director, recalled, “As a staff we were really trying to maintain, get through from January to April with open positions in a lot of my areas.”

Unlike many of their colleagues at ESU, the staff in the Recreation Center had previous exposure to *Learning Reconsidered* before the NASPA Institute. Sean Segawa, an assistant director, shared:

We all heard about it at a national conference. But then, before our current Vice President was hired, our boss now, she had a meeting with all of her professional staff and she was the first to really introduce it to us... our supervisor explained it to us that this isn't just a flash in the pan... you need to learn it and implement it. If you don't then you are behind the curve what other, what all universities should be doing.

The Assistant Vice President explained her reasoning for spending time discussing *Learning Reconsidered* early on with her staff:

I did that a year ago, before Charlotte came on while we had an interim vice president. So in that interim I kind of started setting up the environment, that the environment was going to change... I typed up a three page review of it... a cheat sheet for my staff... I just started introducing it... and then in January we had the NASPA Institute where we had five days of intensive topics on student affairs... so, that was really our message, that it is coming our way.

In addition to reading the document, the director had her staff review related articles, participate in an audio conference, benchmark themselves against other institutions, and begin to evaluate the unit's strengths, weaknesses, mission, and vision as well as consider what they really wanted students to learn. During these early conversations about *Learning Reconsidered* the staff started to understand its utility but remained overwhelmed by the information and the amount of time it would take to implement. Sean recalled:

I guess in some way we could see that it made sense. We realize that students are learning things that can apply to their lifelong learning as far as for their jobs and things. But to write down what we plan on for them to learn and actually follow through on that and telling them while you are going through this and how this applies to your life versus we already assumed they were getting those lifelong skills.

Although they had previous exposure to *Learning Reconsidered* when it was introduced to the entire division at the NASPA Institute in January of 2008, each of the professionals in campus recreation shared that the experience was “definitely overwhelming.” In the months immediately following the institute, they focused on maintaining services and programs and limited their implementation efforts to ongoing monthly conversations. Patti reasoned, “Part of that was because our [then] director left in December so we all had to take on more responsibilities so we really didn’t have the time.”

As the academic year came to a close and the staff shifted their attention to the busy summer camp season, the Assistant Vice President and now Director of the

Recreation Center continued to use staff meetings to focus their attention on *Learning Reconsidered*. In addition, she frequently assigned the staff “homework” (e.g., developing outcomes, summarizing resources) and used their time together to share ideas to move the implementation process forward. In late July the staff convened alongside others in the division for the workshop by the Keeling Group to develop learning outcomes and assessment measures. The staff commented that they appreciated the hands-on approach that combined concrete examples, opportunities to develop outcomes, and feedback from the consultants. Patti described her state-of-mind following the workshop:

It’s to the point that I don’t think it is overwhelming anymore, I feel like its more manageable. And the time is still a little bit of an issue but it is nowhere like I felt in the beginning. And it’s almost like after the third time finally it’s sinking in. I know what needs to be done. I feel more comfortable reading the material. I know what I’m reading.

By the beginning of September the Assistant Vice President, and now permanent **D**irector of the Campus Recreation Center, was balancing pressure to move forward **q**uickly with her belief that to implement *Learning Reconsidered* effectively campus **r**ecreation staff needed to devote ample time to the process. She shared:

I don’t care about my evaluation on the two [learning outcomes]... I want to make sure that we have looked at our own mission statement, that we’ve sat down and looked at all of our own areas and developed our own goals. And so, I’m backing up with my staff because I noticed I was buying into the shotgun approach and I think everyone is feeling that way... and I think you will hear that I think my staff

feels the same way. If they don't understand the concepts fully and they just went out to a day workshop where we scribbled notes and got handouts but they didn't really understand then it really is just a check, check. We do that. Yup, we do learning outcomes... I just, I'm not going to respond that way... we haven't done the most important part. Where are the other six chapters? You know, one chapter is on learning outcomes and all the others are on planning for, setting up the staff, making sure they are ready for so that is kind of where we are right now.

With the goal of giving her staff the space and time to implement *Learning Reconsidered*, the Assistant Vice President sent an email to the professional staff sharing **her** concerns about the process thus far and outlining a plan to move them forward. Patti, **the** Assistant Director of the Recreation Center, read a portion of the email, infusing some **of her** own reactions:

My thoughts thus far. Adequate planning has not yet occurred - so she goes back to things we need to do - review university mission, divisional mission, creation of strategies, objectives, and goals. Address critical questions and take a look at everything we do. Rethink everything and learn to do the student learning outcomes and establish two of them.

Patti and Sean each shared that the email relieved a great deal of pressure they were **feeling** to just get the learning outcomes in place. Patti reflected:

I think our supervisor has been the most helpful because I think if we were just going to these meetings without her we would just think that the Vice President just wants us to come up with two learning outcomes, quick, let's get it done. Let's do a quick search. What can we borrow from another school and that's it.

And she has made us really think about it and what we are doing and what it is that we want our student to learn.

In thinking about how his perspective on *Learning Reconsidered* shifted over the past year, Sean mused:

It grows on you. At first it was just kinda like here, we are doing this, you have to do this. But the purpose is the betterment of the division but also our department so we can make sure that what we are planning and doing has a purpose.

Although staffing challenges slowed the implementation process, by mid-September the campus recreation staff was reviewing their mission, vision, programs, and services in relation to *Learning Reconsidered* while beginning to develop learning outcomes. After focusing significant early attention on building a common understanding of *Learning Reconsidered* and discussing how its implementation might affect their ongoing work in campus recreation they were now moving forward at their own pace and led by the Assistant Vice President and Director of the Campus Recreation Center.

Moving Forward at Eastern State University

Nine months after the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* at Eastern State University many professionals continue to struggle to make sense of the document's recommendations in relation to their ongoing work within their departments. Others remain uncertain of the vision and expectations of the vice president related to division-wide efforts or how department-level implementation connects to the bigger picture. Although some remain excited about the possibilities that lay ahead for student affairs at ESU, the majority have adopted a wait-and-see approach as they await the arrival of the

new Associate Vice President charged with leading implementation. The Associate Director of Housing captured the uncertainty prevalent throughout the division:

She'll [the new Associate Vice President] be doing, I and a lot of people are assuming, a lot of the assessment piece that will kind of consistent for all of the areas to use. I think that's honestly where I, speaking for myself, am still looking for direction. That is what is stopping-up the division at least from my perspective and the different people that I talk with is that we are still kind of waiting even for the expectations of the VP to be clearly shared with the group maybe on a regular basis and for a direction of where this is all going.

Summary

Learning Reconsidered was introduced to the division of student affairs at Eastern State University during the NASPA Institute, a five-day, on-campus professional development experience. Charlotte Pippen, the recently appointed Vice President of Student Affairs, intended to use the Institute to kick start implementation by providing the staff an understanding of the importance of *Learning Reconsidered* by placing it in the broader history and context of postsecondary education in the United States. The response of the staff to the institute was mixed. Although many were excited by the new focus on learning outcomes and assessment, others were overwhelmed by the prospect of being stretched even further and some felt *Learning Reconsidered* was being “shoved down their throats” by the new vice president. Following the conclusion of the institute, implementation occurred along three different tracks – the cabinet level, centralized student affairs, and department-level.

As the process unfolded, Pippen spent the majority of her time framing the utility of the document to her colleagues on the cabinet and less time communicating with her staff in the student affairs division. The lack of ongoing communication or clear expectations from the Vice President left department-level directors unsure how to proceed. Another outcome of the lack of discussion about the effort was a growing distrust of Pippen and increased frustration among the previously engaged department-level directors. Pippen's lack of attention to the implementation effort within the division (outside of the NASPA Institute and a visit by the Keeling Group) was particularly frustrating to her staff when she employed levers to nudge implementation forward such as an unexpected and retroactive change to staff evaluation. Consequently, the staff increasingly felt that implementation was being forced on them with little time provided for planning centrally or within departments. In short, many student affairs professionals felt that change was happening to them, not with them.

Even with the lack of clear expectations or ongoing communication by Pippen, a number of departments in which *Learning Reconsidered* made good sense moved forward quickly to develop outcomes and assessment plans. These departments were frequently led by professionals with previous experience writing and assessing learning outcomes. On the other hand, in units where the recommendations in *Learning Reconsidered* were less of an obvious fit, the implementation effort was slow to move forward.

CHAPTER FIVE

Pioneer State University

The implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* in the Division of Student Affairs at Pioneer State University [PSU] unfolded over the past five years following its introduction by the long-serving Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs. Although the primary impetus for implementing *Learning Reconsidered* varied among the “homegrown” student affairs professionals at PSU, the key shared driver was a critical accreditation report that resulted in a renewed institution-wide focus on the assessment of student learning – a core recommendation of *Learning Reconsidered*. Other influential factors included: 1) the presence of a Dean of Students who was eager to document the impact of student learning in the division; 2) the leadership of the Vice President and multiple mid-level directors; 3) the decentralized implementation process; 4) the unique institutional culture; 5) the availability of in-house experts to support the effort; and 6) student affairs staff attendance at national and regional conferences.

In the five years since the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* on campus, multiple departments at Pioneer State have received national recognition for their ongoing implementation efforts. On the other hand, many student affairs professionals at PSU believe the implementation effort has resulted in only modest success. This case study begins with a description of Pioneer State University, moves to an overview of the division of student affairs, and concludes with a synopsis of the generally decentralized implementation process of *Learning Reconsidered* at PSU, including how it unfolded in multiple departments within the division.

Institutional Overview

Pioneer State University was founded in the last quarter of the 19th century to serve as the flagship institution of a largely rural and relatively “isolated” Midwestern state. Today, the town in which the university is located has grown to a bustling city of 50,000 described by the Assistant Dean of Students as “a small town” in which relationships are important and trust is essential. The campus physical plant is a mix of well-manicured lawns, a meandering creek, and many well-maintained, new, or recently renovated buildings. Among the recent additions to campus are a state-of-the-art wellness center, a spiritual center, hockey arena, and suite-style residence hall as well as a renovated student union building and main library. Students, faculty, and staff are quietly proud of the university and their collective accomplishments, and are quick to welcome guests to campus to share with them their love of PSU.

The university currently enrolls 10,000 undergraduate students each year who pursue degrees in 193 fields of study. Pioneer State has particularly well-regarded programs in elementary education, psychology, communication, and nursing and is internationally renowned for its outstanding aerospace program that attracts students from around the United States and the world. The undergraduate population is split equally between in-state students from the numerous rural towns that dot the sparsely populated state and out-of-state students from the suburbs of the closest metropolitan area located 300 miles to the southeast. In addition to its undergraduate degree offerings, the university annually enrolls a combined 2,000 advanced students pursuing degrees in its graduate school, school of law, and medical school.

The Pioneer State University website notes that the institution has a “strong tradition of academic excellence and service to learners,” and remains “proud of the quality of its academic programs and the success of its more than 70,000 alumni.” In addition to its continuing commitment to providing an outstanding educational experience for its students, the two most recent presidents focused significant attention and resources on enhancing the quality of research across campus. The Assistant Provost for Assessment summarized:

I would say that PSU is an institution that has a long history of being very learning focused, and teaching and learning has been fairly highly valued. And we have been in the last ten years undergoing a transition to being a more purposefully research-orientated campus... It’s a pressure at every institution. And it’s one that in the last several years has been particularly strongly felt here... We are trying to have our cake and eat it too as an institution with no more resources. And what that means is that there’s just this constant effort to do more on the backs of the people who are already here.

Beyond fulfilling its teaching and research missions, Pioneer State is also the **primary** intellectual, cultural, and social hub for the region. Throughout the year the **campus** hosts numerous lectures, continuing education opportunities, theatre productions, **festivals**, and intercollegiate athletic events. The university’s athletic teams are a point of **pride** for the entire state and evidence of the town’s pride in the university is on display in **the** myriad campus symbols that decorate the restaurants, shops, and public spaces **throughout** the community.

For a variety of reasons, including the campus being a “friendly place to work” and the university being an “employer of choice” in the region, faculty and staff frequently discussed their appreciation of the high quality work-life at the university. The Director of the Student Union commented, “The staff that are working here love working here, and, I, and I am saying that in the broadest sense of the staff.” Another administrator shared that there is “the sense that we are all family. That we are all Pioneer State University.” Possibly as a result of the high quality of work-life, many participants noted that faculty and staff longevity was the norm throughout the institution. The Associate Dean of Students, an alumna herself, shared,

There are different levels of being inside and everything is relationship based and there is kind of an unwritten expectation that if you come here that longevity means that you spend 30 years here because that is what many of our senior leaders have chosen to do.

The relational nature of campus is further enhanced by the moderate size of the institution. The Coordinator of Greek Life reflected:

For me, in terms of the culture, is again, it’s the size of this institution. Twelve-thousand students is really a great number and I think what makes it great is there’s the ability for strong relationships to develop across areas... on this campus I could give you the direct phone number of anybody in probably any department that I could specifically refer a student to.

The Assistant Dean of Students, a staff member relatively new to the university, concurred with the Coordinator of Greek Life’s assessment and added:

I think the thing that becomes evident very quickly is how important relationships are... and the level of integrity that is expected within that relationship that you are going to have is, I think like a lot of folks in the west, there is an assumption that I can trust you until you prove I can't trust you and once you lost that it is really difficult to get back.

The impact of staff longevity and the relational nature of the organization were noted as having both positive and negative ramifications on the adoption and implementation of new ideas such as *Learning Reconsidered*. The Associate Dean of Students reflected:

I think that [longevity] brings along its own culture in that we replicate what we know and sometimes knowing new things is rather problematic. People don't necessarily want that.

The Director of Multicultural Affairs, a staff member who considers himself an outsider even after 10 years at the university, added:

Well, it is obviously a learning experience when you come into a culture where most of the people are homegrown. They are from this state, they know the Pioneer State way, they use the term "Midwestern Nice" a lot and that could be good or that could be bad. It could mean that they are not thinking out of the box. That they are not willing to open up and think outside the box.

In contrast to the perspective that longevity inhibited the introduction of new ideas, the Associate and Assistant Deans each also shared that it frequently contributed to new ideas being successfully put into practice. They theorized that new programs were able to be successfully developed because one by-product of faculty and staff working

together over many years was the development of high-quality, highly collaborative relationships at PSU. Evidence cited to support this perspective included the existence of flourishing curricular and co curricular programs such as the highly innovative aerospace program, a model crisis response team, and a cutting-edge wellness initiative.

Student Affairs at Pioneer State University

The Division of Student Affairs at Pioneer State University has a long history of contributing to the quality of the student experience through its myriad support services and co curricular programming. The comprehensive and relatively large organization includes traditional student affairs functions as well as the university's continuing education and outreach programs. The division is organized into four relatively autonomous clusters – Student Services, Enrollment Management, Wellness, and Continuing Education. The departments that populate each cluster report to an Assistant or Associate Vice President described by the Vice President as each “marching to the beat of their own drummer.” Kathy Svenson, the Associate Vice President for Student Services and Dean of Students, oversees numerous areas including the Dean of Students Office, Student Union, Women's Center, and Multicultural Student Services. Dr. Janice Goida, the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, provides leadership to Admissions, Financial Aid, the Learning Center, and Career Services. Dr. Shana Albright, the Assistant Vice President for Wellness, leads the Wellness Center and recently assumed responsibility for the Student Health Center. The Continuing Education cluster, which is comprised of continuing and distance education programs, was not examined as part of this study.

The division is led by Dr. Steven Van Galder, the long-serving and highly **re**spected Vice President of Student Affairs and the former Dean of Continuing **E**ducation. Van Galder arrived at PSU in the mid-1970s after serving as a high school **pr**incipal. He has garnered a reputation among academic administrators, faculty, and **st**udent affairs staff as a strong communicator and outstanding leader who takes time to **bu**ild relationships with individuals at all levels of the organization. Van Galder believes **th**at “organizations are never about things. Organizations are always about people.” He **co**ntinued, “One of the secrets of effective leadership is to know your people very **we**ll...particularly those that work most closely with you. They are individuals.” His **en**actment of these values led to his hiring four assistant and associate vice presidents **with** diverse personalities and leadership styles that he provides with ample autonomy to **op**erate in their own unique way. Van Galder shared:

I get these four together. It’s interesting to see them interact, because they are four very different people. And yet they like each other. They respect each other. They support each other. Wouldn’t even dream of not being supportive of each other, but they kid each other because of the approaches that each takes is different.

The majority of student affairs professionals at Pioneer State are “local, **home**grown talent” that often pursue, if ever, a graduate degree only after they have **se**cured a position in the division. Gwen Fornley, a current faculty member in the higher **educa**tion program and former vice president of student affairs, described the staff:

I have very high regard for many of the professionals in student affairs at PSU. I think it is an interesting organization because it is a major university. However, because of geography, they have a very difficult time recruiting and retaining

highly qualified professionals... you don't, by virtue of educational background in the leadership team of student affairs, you do not have academically credentialed student affairs professionals...I think people are doing the best they know how to do.

The student affairs division is filled with long-serving, dedicated professionals **who** are committed to students and their success. The widely-shared ethos of the **organization** was summarized by the Coordinator of Greek Life: "I think it is a culture **that** really is all about the students. It's about helping them to the extent that we can." The **centrality** of students in the minds of many student affairs staff is symbolized by a plaque **found** in nearly every office across campus commemorating a former vice president's **mantra**, "But is it right for students?"

Despite student-centeredness being a core organizational value, it has not **cons**istently resulted in the implementation of innovative programs or practices across the **division**. Gwen Fornley explained:

This organization, in my mind, feels like it's in the late 80s, early 90s. There's not a service orientation... I don't see the kinds of things that I did in the 90s as an administrator and the kinds of questions I had to be asked and had to ask myself in the 90s and early 2000... We need to think. We need to reimagine what we're doing. I don't think this organization has.

One **ex**planation cited for this is that the division and the majority of the professionals that **pop**ulate it have maintained only a modest degree of involvement with regional and **national** student affairs organizations. As a result, PSU has remained relatively isolated from **a** number of national trends.

As discussed in the overview of the broader institution, staff longevity in student affairs was noted as contributing to a tension between the implementation of new ideas and maintaining things “as they have always been done.” The Assistant Dean of Students remarked bluntly of his first impression of how PSU operated:

The thing that struck me in my first several weeks here is how many fucking rules there are in this place. And it has to be said that way for me... I was overwhelmed with how rule-bound the culture is.

The Assistant Dean shared that part of his frustration was due to the unwritten nature of the rules that frequently guided decision-making across the organization and the strict adherence many of his colleagues had to them. One reason for the rule-bound nature of student affairs professionals at PSU was articulated by the Coordinator of Greek Life, “I’m a suck up and I live in a culture of suck ups. So I think that people want to make the people above us happy. We want to impress them. We’re that – you’ll hear the phrase – Midwestern Nice.”

A consequence of the rule-bound culture in the division was noted by Vice President Van Galder who stated that one of his primary roles in leading any change effort in student affairs at PSU was to grant permission to the staff to try something new. He stated that without permission being granted from the top of the organization, it was unlikely that any change effort would be successful.

Among the myriad unwritten rules at Pioneer State was a historical delineation between the roles of student affairs professionals and faculty. The Assistant Dean of Student explained, “There is this distinction between the work we do and the work they see themselves doing and it is competing... in terms of being a student affairs person here

the work is valued but the work is not academic.” The Assistant Provost for Assessment **ar**ticulated the faculty perspective on student affairs matter-of-factly:

I think that in general, faculty are kind of oblivious to student affairs people... and student affairs has very little reason to draw itself to their attention... But a lot of the student affairs side of things would be pretty much invisible or not salient to faculty. They wouldn't think about it.

Vice President Van Galder added that in his experience, even when student affairs **pr**ofessionals were content experts on a topic, they were rarely viewed that way by their **fa**culy colleagues.

Over the last few years, however, the Assistant Provost noted a shift in the profile **and** role of student affairs among the university leadership and faculty slowly occurring:

It's my perception that that has actually decreased in recent years that, in fact, student affairs has perhaps raised their profile and been more purposefully involved with faculty and in things that interest faculty. I think the work has come from their side, but it's my perception that they have – they are a little more integrated into things that might nest on the academic side of campus... I think that came from their side of the house... I do know for example that student affairs people sit on the assessment committee... and they are – I mean, they are just totally viewed as peers... And I think about the Essential Studies, or General Education Task Force that put together the new general education program. There was a purposeful effort to make sure that we had student affairs people represented there and they were very thoroughly integrated... of course, lines are there... But the fact the lines don't seem to be noticed or thought about by people

in general suggest to me that they are more integrated than they would have been some time ago.

The Dean of Students shared another reason for the recent shift in the value for **an** perception of the student affairs professionals among faculty and academic **ad**ministrators. She believed that it was the division's ability to effectively respond to a **se**ries of high-profile tragedies on campus that increased the value of student affairs **am**ong many of her academic colleagues on the Dean's Council. As a result of student **aff**airs' collective ability to effectively navigate these high profile incidents, the Dean of **St**udents in particular and the division in general were gaining respect among the **Pr**esident, Council of Deans, and the broader university community for their competence **and** professionalism.

In summary, the Division of Student Affairs at Pioneer was in the midst of **gain**ing increased respect among its academic colleagues while simultaneously **integ**rating slowly into the academic side of the institution. One result of these two **chan**ges was that a number of key student affairs professionals were active members of **the** recently reinstituted University Assessment Committee developed in response to the **critical** accreditation report. The shifting relationship between student and academic **aff**airs was positioning the division to actively participate in the institutional response to **the** **acc**reditation report's call for PSU to ramp up its assessment of student learning. It **was** **into** this milieu that *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced and implemented.

Implementing Learning Reconsidered at Pioneer State University

The implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* at Pioneer State began after its **introdu**ction by the Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students during the

2003-2004 academic year. Though their individual motivations for introducing it **differed**, each recognized the utility of the document's recommendations in improving **practice** across the division. The Vice President's initial introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* to the director-level leadership team was well-received. As implementation **progressed**, Vice Present Van Galder adopted a decentralized process in which each **associate** vice president was asked to provide leadership for their cluster and **departmental** directors were charged with selecting which recommendations they put into **practice** and how they would do so.

While many variables influenced the implementation process, one particularly key **factor** was the timing of the effort in relation to Pioneer State's renewed focus on **assessing** student learning that resulted from a critical accreditation report. The **Coordinator** of Greek Life, who also served as a doctoral intern supporting the **implementation** process, reflected:

I think for us it really was, you know, kind of those two roads converged in a woods or something like that. PSU had its visit by the Higher Learning Commission... I'm gonna be off in my years but they did converge... basically we were told as an institution we needed to do better in the area of assessment of student learning. And while I think primarily the Higher Learning Commission's criticism came of more the academic side of the institution, our Dean of Students serves on the Council of Deans so she certainly hears those messages when they're reported... She realized that we were doing learning outside of the classroom as well, that this wasn't just about the learning in the classroom because the students were learning in our programs.

One result of the convergence of the heightened level of accreditation-fueled anxiety permeating Pioneer State and the timing of the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* was that the student affairs directors were looking for something to put into place to support the institutional response to the report. The Coordinator of Greek Life continued:

And so I think the Higher Learning Commission being here and saying we need to do more, *Learning Reconsidered* just came out at the right time and it was the piece Dean Svenson could bring back because it talked about student learning and assessment in a practical manner and in a student affairs or student services type of presentation. It was an easy read.... And again, that middle chart I think just was this aha moment for people and it allowed them to realize, "Oh yeah, this is how my program fits in there."... It was just this, by coincidence, we were at a point where the Higher Learning Commission then challenged us on student assessment and *Learning Reconsidered* was just this really practical tool that could be applied to what we were trying to find out and it provided a common language and I think that was really important.

The Greek Life Coordinator's perspective on the importance of the timing of the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* was shared by many of the student affairs staff at PSU. The general sentiment was that because *Learning Reconsidered* provided a common language and easily understood framework to guide department-level assessment of student learning and was introduced at a time when staff were looking for a way to contribute to the institution-wide response to the accreditation report, it was quickly embraced.

The implementation effort that unfolded at the departmental level was fueled by anxiety related to the accreditation report and the drive to contribute to the broader institutional effort to assess student learning. The final two sections of this case study include: 1) an overview of the efforts of the Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students to introduce *Learning Reconsidered* and promote its implementation; and 2) a description of the implementation process within the division of student affairs across multiple, representative departments within three of the four clusters in the division.

Bringing Learning Reconsidered to Pioneer State University

Learning Reconsidered arrived at Pioneer State via the US Postal Service. Vice President Van Galder shared his initial reaction upon receiving and reviewing the document:

I got a mailing from NASPA, and the publication came in the mail. It caught my attention... because I remembered a book by Ernest Boyer... called *Scholarship Reconsidered*... When I saw that title, I thought, if this is asking us to think about learning in a – in a different way that could be energizing and exciting simply because it is different – like moving your furniture around your living room. I mean, there's some energy that comes from just having something different. But what I was hoping was that the publication was not only going to help us think through a different paradigm, but that it was going to be grounded in some research and would provide more than just kind of a new model.

Within the same time period, the Dean of Students learned of *Learning Reconsidered* while attending a program session at a national student affairs conference. Dean Svenson recalled:

When it [*Learning Reconsidered*] first came out... I said, "Oh, this is something that could be helpful because there is always the quality improvement piece and there's the why should we fund this activity anyway." So there's the quality piece but there is also the accountability piece. And being their leader I knew that that would work and I liked what I read in *Learning Reconsidered*.

In the weeks following their introduction to the document, Dean Svenson and Vice President Van Galder agreed to share *Learning Reconsidered* with directors throughout the division of student affairs as well as with academic colleagues. Van Galder commented on the initial wide-scale introduction to the division:

We purchased enough books so that it could be fairly widely distributed around the division. Then I – I have a Council – Student Affairs and Continuing Education which is made up of my four associate and assistant vice presidents and all of their direct reports; so it ends up being about 23 people... that's where we began to talk about *Learning Reconsidered* and how does it have an impact on us.

Many of the home-grown student affairs directors' comfort with and response to the initially foreign ideas embedded in *Learning Reconsidered* were closely connected to their educational and professional background. The Union Director recalled how he relied on his experience in the military as a trainer to make sense of the document:

Learning Reconsidered came out. It was shared throughout our division... I read it, and it was very clear to me... it makes sense. I realize, "Gee, I've been doing this for years." ...So it made sense, so it wasn't really where I had to do a lot of understanding. It was just a piece of cake.

During these early conversations, the majority of members of the Vice President's Council quickly recognized the potential utility of implementing the core recommendations in *Learning Reconsidered*. A common reaction was captured by the Assistant Vice President of Wellness:

Dr. Van Galder brought that publication back from NASPA. So the *Learning Reconsidered* and then *Learning Reconsidered 2* came forward, and as you know the myriad different partners signed on to that... including NIRSA [National Intramural- Recreational Sports Association] and others were saying, "Boy this makes some sense." We're able to look at things like cognitive complexity. We're able to look at some of the things that we know we value and now we're going to try and say how that fits... because this is so – you know for years in student affairs, my understanding is we've been saying real learning happens outside the classroom; you know internships, coops. Real learning happens there. But real learning happens in social settings. Real learning happens in extracurricular activities. We've been saying that, and we've been saying that we contribute to the whole academic experience, but now we're being asked to prove it. And I think that's ok.

Although the majority of directors responded positively to the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*, a small cadre of student affairs professionals reacted with less enthusiasm. One reason for their reluctance was a perception that the document lacked relevance to their work. The Assistant Provost for Assessment shared a recent conversation, "I remember a meeting with someone from student affairs here at PSU last spring that clearly saw this as, you know, like a poor fit being imposed upon them for no

clear reason.” The Vice President of Student Affairs believed that this perception was a result of the lack of time he and the associate vice presidents allocated to working directly with staff members that struggled to initially grasp the ideas in *Learning Reconsidered*. He stated:

There were some who understood how valuable it could be, and there were others who didn’t get it. I think those who didn’t get it, we need to take – those of us in – on the vice presidential and associate vice president level have to take some responsibility for that. Again, people don’t resist change, they resist being changed...But I don’t think we were as successful as I wanted us to be at almost on a one-to-one [level].

By the end of the first few months of implementation many directors in the division were on board. In reflecting on the division’s efforts to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice, Vice President Van Galder explained that he believed that three key things laid the groundwork for the organization to move forward. He recalled:

One is that messages were clearly sent that this is something we want you to think about, and in that sense I suppose we listed it as a priority. But it, it was seen by the leadership, the council as something that merited their attention. Secondly, the thing that I’ve talked about since is that people were then given permission. They were given permission to not approach *Learning Reconsidered* from the same way and applying it the same way, or even taking the same nuggets, to use the Union Director’s terminology. So a combination of priority and permission. And then, you know I think to some degree, recognition, not in the sense of

motivation, but recognition in the sense that collectively people could see some results.

In the five years since the initial introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*, a series of actions were taken by the Vice President, Dean of Students and others to move the implementation effort forward. These included: 1) prioritizing its implementation for staff throughout the division; 2) granting directors permission to choose their own approach to putting the document into practice; and 3) recognizing the effort and outcomes of the implementation process throughout the organization.

With the goal of sending a message to the members of his Council that implementing *Learning Reconsidered* was a priority, Van Galder kept it as a frequent agenda item at council meetings. The Director of the Learning Center stated, “It was presented to us and laid out. And not just once but a couple of times.” Over time, the conversations at the council meetings morphed from discussing how *Learning Reconsidered* might be implemented at Pioneer State to how different departments were putting the ideas into action. The Director of the Union shared:

I even remember making a presentation to the council early on... As I think about it, I think several of the departments made presentations as time went on, on how we were using *Learning Reconsidered*. And it was mostly around assessment.

In addition to keeping *Learning Reconsidered* on the agenda at the council meetings, Van Galder gave significant attention to providing the education and training needed by individuals in the division to move forward on their implementation efforts. Among the support mechanisms developed were a “Dean’s Seminar” that operated similarly to a book club, the funding of “several people over time to go to assessment

conferences,” a series of training sessions by in-house experts, contracting an educational leadership faculty member and appointing a doctoral intern to work with individual directors on their efforts, and availability of the Assistant Provost for Assessment as an informal consultant. The Assistant Provost described how she helped student affairs staff move forward and why she believed she was effective:

Those kinds of things are all one-on-one conversations... with a specific person who's directing an office or one service or another who contact me and says, I have this question. Or, how do I do this? Or, can I ask you a question? Or something like that. And I mean, one-on-one when you can sit down together and brainstorm about a particular challenge that somebody's had... I'm not constrained by knowing anything about what they are doing. So, I mean, I can start from zero, except my knowledge of assessment, I can ask them questions. It's just a fun conversation. And they've been really amenable to those conversations... And what makes that for me with both faculty and student affairs people is the fact that they are coming to me voluntarily... But the thing of it is, anytime you're having this conversation where they have a problem, they can't figure out how to do something, they know that they're being ask to do something. And I'm not the hammer. I'm the tool, you know? I'm helping.

One lever used to prioritize *Learning Reconsidered* across the division was the additional requirement that each department submit an assessment plan articulating ongoing efforts to document student learning. After three years this stand-alone assessment plan was integrated into each department's annual report that is shared

campus-wide with feedback given by the University Assessment Committee. The Coordinator of Greek Life noted:

I think it [the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*] really probably, where the tire meets the road, it's a part of our annual report... so there's the whole section on assessment. Well, we've got to have something there and it can't just be satisfaction. Our university assessment committee evaluates our assessment just like they do the academic units and they're gonna look, are we providing opportunities for students to learn.

Another lever cited by Vice President Van Galder that enabled implementation was that individual directors were given permission to take risks as they chose how to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Van Galder stated:

I have never seen any kind of paradigm shift of any significance take place within an organization without permission being granted. And change or paradigm shifts always carry with it a degree of risk, and that's where permission comes in. If I don't have the permission, and I don't mean in the sense of I wrote a memo, and you said approved on it. Permission comes in a variety of ways, yet it – it may simply be a word of encouragement that's given, or someone comes in and says, "I'd like to try something new." And you give that sense that you've almost been liberated to – to try something. That, that permission ends up being terribly, terribly important. I think that those who took *Learning Reconsidered* and applied it in whatever way... did so in an environment where they felt they had permission to do so.

An additional lever shared by Van Galder was the importance of recognizing the good work that staff members were engaged in throughout the division. Recognition came in multiple ways including the vice president asking early adopters to share their implementation stories at council meetings as well as providing forums for others to develop workshops to further encourage and support their colleagues' efforts. The Dean of Students was cited as particularly effective in "sharing the success stories" in various forums as the process unfolded. Finally, a number of directors were encouraged to submit the results of their efforts to their professional organizations. As a result, many departments were included as examples of good practice in *Learning Reconsidered 2* and on the *Learning Reconsidered* website.

In contrast to the generally positive reception *Learning Reconsidered* received within the division of student affairs, the document was generally ignored after its introduction by colleagues in academic affairs. The Dean of Students recalled:

So I gave copies... [to the] Provost saying, "We would like you to visit with us about where the collaborative pieces are"... so the Acting Provost, she never did. And she is a friend of mine, but she never did find the time to see this as a priority. So there was never a conversation but I said, "I don't care, we are going ahead because he and she that write their own future will have a future."

Not to be deterred, Dean Svenson introduced *Learning Reconsidered* to other members of the newly reconstituted University Assessment Committee on which she served.

Although this failed to result in her academic colleagues collaborating on student affairs' implementation efforts, it eventually lead to the division's work to document student learning being included in the institutional response to the accreditation report. Division-

wide awareness of this inclusion, and the recognition that resulted, were cited by a number of directors as further fueling implementation efforts within their individual departments.

In addition to the aforementioned factors affecting implementation, numerous student affairs professionals were influenced by their professional development and continuing education experiences outside of the division. In the midst of implementation a number of staff members attended a regional NASPA conference where they heard a keynote address from one of the authors of *Learning Reconsidered*. The Director of the Union recalled:

Susan Komives was one of the keynote speakers, and listening to her keynote, all of a sudden the things that she was saying had matched very closely with a lot of the things that I had been thinking about to this point because I had walked into this role with a lot of work to do with the staff. And so it kind of sparked the idea after listening to her about the relationships between the staff and the students on the employment side.

Finally, a number of mid- and entry-level professionals were completing masters-level coursework in educational leadership and as a result were taking a course taught by Gwen Fornley that exposed them to a number of resources - including *Learning Reconsidered* – that supported their implementation efforts. In fact, many early adopting mid- and entry-level administrators in the division shared that it was as a result of their experience in this course that they developed their commitment to, understanding of, and ability to implement *Learning Reconsidered*.

Implementing at the Department Level

Following the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* by the Vice President and Dean of Students and the Council's collective decision to embrace it as a guiding document, putting the various recommendations into practice was charged to the clusters under the leadership of the four associate vice presidents. The Assistant Vice President for Wellness recalled:

This charge was then delivered by – from Vice President Van Galder's level. He has four AVPs, and they take it back to their unit saying, "Ok guys, you know, belly up. This is what we need and this is when we need it by."

Although how each associate vice president led the effort differed, all of them provided some degree of autonomy to the directors in their cluster to choose how implementation would occur at the department level. In the three clusters examined – Student Services, Enrollment Management, and Wellness - the process unfolded at varying paces and in different ways. The Coordinator of Greek Life, because of her role as doctoral intern, was responsible for documenting implementation efforts across the division. She shared her perspective on how and why the pace of implementation varied across clusters:

I think the student services area was probably the quickest to come on and I think that is because it is the fairly traditional student services... I think in the enrollment management area it may be a little bit not as quick to come on. I don't think they are as engaged with NASPA as a unit type of thing... I think for them it's a little bit more difficult – as it would be for me – to decipher the student learning that results from financial aid or from the admissions process... I think

for our TRIO Programs [as part of the Enrollment Management], again, applicable, but they have various other reporting methods and requirements per federal grants and stuff like that, so I think those units, a little bit slower... I think our Wellness Center embraced it... Wellness came on like gangbusters when they finally just got the facility built. So again, a little bit later, but that was only because it had to come later. They had to get that facility operational.

In addition to the variable pace of implementation across clusters, the process by which each unfolded also differed. The final section of this case provides an overview of the implementation process within a number of representative departments in each of the clusters across the student affairs division.

The student services cluster – It just fit. At the time of the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*, the student services cluster at Pioneer State University consisted of many of the “traditional” student affairs departments including the Dean of Students Office, Student Union, Greek Life, Multicultural Affairs, and the Women’s Center. The cluster was led by Associate Vice President and Dean of Students Kathy Svenson who, after 35 years of service at PSU, was widely considered the primary voice of student affairs on campus. Because of her dual roles as division-wide change agent and leader of the student services cluster, many tactics she employed at the division level were also used to promote implementation by directors in her cluster. Throughout the process Dean Svenson articulated that she was guided by two core beliefs. First, she believed that although each director was managing multiple priorities, they were all “people of good will trying to be good team members about moving ahead on assessment.” Second, Svenson believed that if she mandated the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*, it

was unlikely the effort would succeed. She shared, “If they don’t see it in their own best interest it will never happen.”

Upon receiving the charge from the Vice President, Dean Svenson quickly commenced with repeated, cluster-wide conversations in staff meetings and later at a retreat. She recalled:

We went through it [*Learning Reconsidered*] in terms of just brainstorming what they [individual departments] might apply because we are talking it is a brand new idea. It’s a brand new book. Have people assess their stuff. Well, we have gotten lots of, “Oh, everyone is happy with me” kind of thing. So, we had the mantra of moving from satisfaction to student learning outcomes as the direction.

In the midst of these discussions, Svenson recognized that her director staff varied significantly in their ability to develop learning outcomes and assessment plans. She reflected, “What I needed to figure out was that not everyone knows how to write learning outcomes or does research. It is not stuff that they have done.... So my job really was to have them find their way.” This early recognition led Svenson to create the Dean’s Seminar, hire a faculty consultant, and fund student services staff to attend assessment conferences to support their efforts.

From the outset of the implementation process in the student services cluster, Dean Svenson granted significant autonomy to her directors. This freedom led some to move forward immediately while others stalled and grew frustrated by the lack of concrete and common expectations. Svenson reflected, “What the directors wanted was why should they do something if so-and-so wasn’t doing it the same way. Well, they don’t have the same goal.” Though she found some of the director’s initial responses

perplexing, Svenson said it was her patience and commitment to refrain from dictating how to implement that led to the process flourishing. She reflected, “You know, people were just kind of irritable but I wasn’t ordering it being done. But, just instinct told me that people will only go where they want to go.”

One early adopter in the student services cluster was Dr. William Stone, the Director of the Multicultural Center. Stone shared that after his initial introduction to *Learning Reconsidered* at the council meetings, he took the document back to his office, closed the door, reviewed it, recognized its utility, and quickly incorporated ideas related to holistic student learning and the assessment of learning outcomes into a preexisting, peer-based student retention program. Stone shared that because the Multicultural Center consists of a single full-time professional, one administrative assistant, and three graduate assistants, he was solely responsible for the task of conceptualizing how to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. He stated:

What we [directors across the division] did is we looked at *Learning Reconsidered* as a concept, because that is all it is – a concept, guidelines if that is what you want to call it. We looked at that and we made those connections to what we do and we just reconsidered what we do and how it would fit with this theory or guidelines or concept... So I kind of put it into my mentoring program and made it fit, made my mentoring program fit some of their theories and ideals and guides that came out of *Learning Reconsidered*.

Reflecting on the factors that supported his implementation efforts, Stone credited his doctoral studies and dissertation work in providing him much of the foundational knowledge and skill he needed to move forward. He shared a significant level of

frustration that although the university administration stated that it embraced the program; they lagged in providing additional financial support to allow its further growth. Due to the lack of additional resources, Stone stated that he has had to rely on his entrepreneurial initiative to secure funding through various state and federal grants and Pioneer State University's Student Government Association.

A second early adopting department in the student services cluster was the Student Union. Union Director James McCann arrived at Pioneer State after a career as a trainer in the US Air Force. His experience as a life-long trainer and educator resulted in his immediate commitment to improving the morale, productivity, and retention of student employees in the Union. After a significant building renovation in 2004, McCann found himself searching for a way to "write a new chapter" for the building and therefore, decided to conduct a survey of the student staff to ascertain what they thought of their experience working in the Union. The results of the informal survey led McCann to recognize that an opportunity existed to develop a program that would further enhance the quality of the student employee experience by increasing their awareness of what they were learning. He stated:

Okay so the issue about being intentional, there really wasn't any intentionality taking place. Students were learning. I did the survey again the next year, the same thing asking them questions. Are you learning? Yes they are. But the staff really wasn't doing anything special.

Within the same time period that McCann began to develop and pilot an initiative to intentionally promote student learning, *Learning Reconsidered* was being introduced in the student affairs division at Pioneer State. Soon after, his drive was further fueled by

attending a session at a regional conference that advanced his understanding of how the document could be put into practice. This series of convergences led McCann to ask himself and his staff three questions that continue to guide implementation efforts in the Student Union - What are students learning? How do you know? And how are we using the results to improve?

In order focus his attention on promoting learning among student employees, McCann turned over the task of putting the document into practice in the student services side of the Union to the Greek Life and Student Organizations staff. He shared:

On the student development side of the house, they were implementing assessment strategies and learning outcomes with the constituent of students that they worked with in the Greek community, student organizations; the students that were external to the university. From my perspective, they were, I empowered them to completely do whatever they felt like they needed to be successful.

With attention focused on improving the quality of the student employee experience, McCann began to develop the program. He shared, “On the auxiliary side of the house, I’ll just say I led the charge for the learning outcome and assessment strategies.” He continued with a smile on his face, “Well, I guess I would say sometimes it’s my way or the highway. Okay, I do – I have a little trouble with having to get buy in and getting buy in.” Although McCann moved forward with implementation in a generally unilateral fashion, he remained cognizant of how he might harness the culture and norms already in place at the Union. As an example, McCann’s recognition that students and their supervisors frequently developed close relationships led to him focusing on providing

training to supervisors on how to “coach” the students in ways that increase their learning.

McCann took a series of actions with the goal of enhancing learning among student employees. First, he develop learning outcomes for the student employees by reviewing Pioneer State University’s mission statement, outcomes of the general education curriculum, *Learning Reconsidered*, and a list developed by the National Association of College Employees of the top ten characteristics that employers look for in college graduates. Second, he conducted a workshop for student employee supervisors to introduce the basic concept of the initiative, explain the importance of their role in promoting student learning, and ramp-up their ability to and comfort with serving as a “coach” by providing consistent, quality feedback to students.

The third action McCann took was adjusting full-time employee job descriptions to align with the increased focus of supervisors on promoting student learning. He shared his memory of the reasoning behind this change:

There is nothing in their job descriptions that says you will – how will you interact with students on the job. How will you use feedback skills to help them learn beyond the practical aspect of the job? So when were hiring people we’re hiring them based on their ability to do a job, and that why the auxiliary service person is task oriented and not really pay attention to help the student learn, because they have a job to do... So maybe we look at job descriptions, and maybe we start putting in there, in the job description, that we’re looking for people with outstanding communication skills, or interpersonal skills... There better be

something in her job description or his job description that tells – that we better be hiring somebody who can help student learn in the workplace.

McCann's fourth action was his decision to require all full-time staff to "interview" a student to find out what they learned while working in the Union. McCann hoped that the interviews would spur the staff to begin having consistent conversations with students about what they were learning and result in students' increased reflection.

Although McCann took a number of actions, he refrained from using *Learning Reconsidered* and its philosophical foundations to train the staff. He also avoided asking them to write reports or document the impact of the implementation effort. McCann commented:

All I want staff to do is go through the day with the students, and if you see the opportunity where they've done something where you can give them some good positive feedback, give them the good feedback. Make them feel valued and appreciated, and one of the ways we help them feel valued is when they see they've learned something. I'll worry about writing the reports, and I think it also goes back to when I was talking about the buy-in and the reaction – the initial reaction is because people are afraid. These are, these are staff members that may not normally or typically write reports or put assessment plans together. I'll take care of that.

McCann also recognized that some of the staff has remained uncomfortable with the change in their roles resulting from the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*. He shared:

So my job now is to, is to continue everyday, and you don't just give them a workshop and even put them out there and leave them be. You know it's everyday, how are – how am I setting the example and working individually now with each staff member on their strengths and their skills.

Finally, although McCann moved quickly to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice, some of his staff wished that they had been more involved with the process from the outset. The Coordinator of Greek Life reflected:

I think for the people at the coordinator level who might have been really interested and found this fascinating, I think we were the second tier of the involvement and that was one of my things... This one really started with the directors and I think in a lot of the units, that's the people who did it. And some of our units are very small... I mean it's by nature, but like in our unit, it was Director McCann who did it and tried to communicate it to the rest of us where I wish I would have been able to be at the table to be involved in that conversation with the directors.

The Enrollment Management Cluster – Sharpening the focus. The Enrollment Management Cluster at Pioneer State University includes Admissions, Financial Aid, the Learning Center, TRIO Programs, and the Career Center. The cluster is led by Dr. Janice Goida, a homegrown administrator who ascended to her position after serving as the long-time Director of Financial Aid. Goida, like the Dean of Students, served as a member of the accreditation self-study team and as a result was well aware of the need for PSU to ramp up their efforts to assess student learning. Even prior to being introduced to *Learning Reconsidered*, Goida's drive to contribute to the institution's focus on

student learning led her to push the directors in her cluster to view students utilizing their services as learners rather than as customers.

Goida's initial introduction to *Learning Reconsidered* occurred at a Council meeting when it was presented by the Dean of Students and Vice President of Student Affairs. She shared her initial response to the document, "Conceptually it works, it works very well. Structurally it is much too formal and rigid and theoretical for practical application." Regardless of her personal feelings regarding its utility, Goida brought it to her directors for their consideration after receiving the charge to implement it at the Council meeting. She recalled:

When it was presented to us at council it was also presented with the expectation that we each draft and implement assessment plans. And so as part of that I looked – the way we talked about it in the Enrollment Management unit, we talked about it in a number of management meetings where it was just the directors. When we do events or we do any of our activities or when we do our work, what things have students learned? How do we know? And what are we going to do about it? ... So each of the areas for whom I have responsibility were asked to develop assessment plans, and have.

The general ideas embedded in *Learning Reconsidered* (i.e., the focus on holistic student learning, the importance of learning in co curricular settings) were almost immediately embraced by the directors. One reason cited for this was that many directors were already embracing the culture shift of viewing students as learners. The Director of the Learning Center shared:

I would say that *Learning Reconsidered* wasn't this aha moment. It maybe just brought everything together a bit more. Again, in a more concrete way in terms of it being written down in a publication or in a document... it's given credibility [to the focus on student learning]... sharpened it. Brought it to the foreground more, but it wasn't a massive change, it was just more focused, intentional – words to describe it.

Following its introduction, the cluster-level implementation effort consisted of a few conversations among the directors and Goida setting the expectation that each department submit an assessment plan. Once this expectation was set, Goida allowed each director to work autonomously and continued to focus her attention on promoting the shift in the culture to viewing students as learners. She articulated her role in the implementation process in the following manner:

I see things more administratively or more, that you have to have... If we are going to change a culture here or if we are going to bring something of importance it has to come somewhat officially, politically. So I see the political nature of most everything because that is where I sit and live and work. And without that it falls apart no matter how great the idea is. And so I function with much more of an expanded political role and it has to come from somewhere with someone's name on it to start and be able to speak about it officially.

In looking back at the implementation effort within her cluster, the Director of the Learning Center commented:

You know, I don't think we struggled with implementation because we have always understood students as learners. It just put a report, or a shape to it, so I don't recall

it as being a big deal. And I don't think we acted like *Learning Reconsidered* was the greatest new invention... it just shaped it. And as Dr. Goida indicated, it wasn't something that she necessarily had to mandate to us because it was all just natural, you just needed a frame to report.

The Wellness Cluster – Coming on strong. When *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced at Pioneer State University, the Wellness Cluster was a single department - the Wellness Center. Just a few years prior, the Wellness Center consisted of a newly hired director, a former closet in the campus field house that was being used as an office, and a small room filled with outdated exercise equipment. In her first few years in the director position Dr. Shana Albright, a physical therapist by training, relied upon her background as a small business owner to build relationships across campus, develop a business plan, hire a staff, win funding from the student government to open a new building, and oversee its construction. Although these competing priorities initially slowed the Wellness Center's implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*, in the 12 months since the new building opened significant progress was made to put the document into practice. Today the Wellness Center is described as a fast-paced environment with over 100 student and full-time employees that are "like a crazy family."

Albright, like many of her colleagues on the Vice President's Council, was initially introduced to *Learning Reconsidered* by the Dean of Students and Vice President. Once she was charged with putting it into practice, she purchased copies for each of her senior staff, required that they read it, had them present on various chapters, and began staff-wide discussions about its applicability to their work. The Assistant Director of the Wellness Center for Strategic Planning recalled her reaction:

When *Learning Reconsidered* came out, Shana made us all read it... And I read the book and was completely confused 'cause I had never really heard of stuff like this. I wasn't immersed in the higher ed world. I just happened to work at a university was kind of my mentality at that point. And so I really didn't understand it. I read it and didn't get it... Outside of Shana bringing in the book and having some discussions about it, I never really heard much about *Learning Reconsidered*. So it was really more about the accreditation visit and the need for assessment across the university.

Following these early conversations, the director charged a staff member who was enrolled in the educational leadership masters program the task of moving the implementation effort forward. Albright recalled:

At first blush... it was like, "Well this is not a big deal," and then as she got into theory and the construct of what it really is, it was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so blown away, I don't even know where to start." And so it was like, "Okay breathe deep. Let's work with your [faculty] advisor. Let's take a look at what's possible for us to take on." Because her personality is a large personality, so it was like, "Well we'll assess everything, everything we're doing all over." We said, "Wait, wait, wait, and wait. Let's take a bite that we can actually get our mouth around and might be able to chew."

This conversation resulted in a decision to focus their efforts on developing learning outcomes and assessment measures to document the impact of a single initiative - the Wellness Center's student employee program. The Assistant Director shared:

I know they spun their wheels on it for awhile and then they came up with ...a list and maybe some questions I think that we had implemented into a survey.

In the midst of the initial implementation effort, the staff member assigned to lead the process graduated and left the department. Dr. Abright reassigned responsibility for implementation to the Assistant Director. Although she shared that she “really didn’t get it [*Learning Reconsidered*],” the Assistant Director felt significant pressure to quickly begin assessing what students were learning in order to contribute to the institutional response to the accreditation report. Regardless of her lack of understanding, she worked with colleagues in the Wellness Center to assess nearly all of their programs and sought out professional development opportunities to further develop her knowledge and skills related to assessment. She shared that it was not until after attending an assessment conference sponsored by NASPA with the Coordinator for Greek Life - a year into the process - that she began to understand the “big picture.” At the conference, she also recognized the lack of collaboration existing across departments at PSU in their efforts to assess student learning. She stated:

The Greek Life Coordinator and I talked a lot about assessment within the division while we were there; and since then the two of us plus a few others have worked on or are starting to work on assessment for the division and starting to develop a plan for how that can – how we can all work together.

The combined efforts of the Assistant Director, Coordinator of Greek Life, and Director of the Learning Center to focus on division-wide assessment efforts, rather than the ongoing implementation occurring in a decentralized manner at the department level, was the first that had occurred since the introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*.

Implementation after Accreditation

In the four months after the follow-up visit by the regional accrediting group, there remained mixed feelings about ongoing efforts to implement *Learning Reconsidered* and the assessment of student learning at Pioneer State University. The Assistant Director of the Wellness Center shared:

I have heard very little about assessment since the visit outside of the Wellness Center or this group within the student affairs division that's focusing on assessment and things like that, but I mean generally, you just don't hear much and there's not as big of a push for assessment anymore.

On the other hand, the Coordinator of Greek Life believed that the culture at Pioneer State, at least within student affairs, was shifting towards embracing student learning outcomes and their assessment – though maybe not completely. She stated:

We are assessment focused. You know, I just think of the conversations we're having now. It is – we can't wait until two years before the Higher Learning Commission returns or whatever, we need to make this a part of our culture or continue to make it. It's not about – it's a part of our culture, so we can't lose that. We're having the conversations about what to do next... And I think we're trying to get better at it. I think that the most important thing that we knew we needed to try something. You had to start, I think again, like I said, we tried to do everything and now we are realizing that we can be a little more focused, that maybe we pick a program or we pick a student experience and we try to better and more fully understand it and get a deeper knowledge of what the students are learning outside the classroom. It's the closing the loop aspect. I don't know that we've

done it. I think we have... I don't think – I think across the board, student affairs across the country, it's hard to let go of thing that maybe the students are not learning from... But it's that closing the loop and allowing data to be what informs our practice and not just about personal feelings, love of a program, anecdotal evidence, that type of things. But I don't know. I think we add, add, add but I don't know that we can let go, but it's using the data to close the loop.

Once the pressure and anxiety of the accreditation visit was removed as the primary driver of implementation, a small but growing push was emerging to reexamine the status of the effort. The Assistant Vice President for Wellness, a supporter of the process but cynical of its actual impact on practice at PSU, remained hopeful that a recent conversation with her colleagues would lead to further efforts. She commented:

So we had a deadline, and then had to file these reports, and then they [the accreditation team] came, and everybody got the, "Yeah they could talk to you." You know, "Be prepared, you know what's going on?" But now we've gone past that and I brought it back up, and said, "I don't think we did it" ...and there's a few of us that are asking questions.

Although questions were being posed by senior leadership to push implementation forward and an informal group of professionals had begun to meet to discuss division-wide efforts, the status of the effort to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice post-accreditation remains unclear to many at Pioneer State.

Summary

The introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* occurred at Pioneer State University in the midst of the campus responding to a negative accreditation report that "dinged"

them for a lack of attention to the assessment of student learning. In short, the long-serving Vice President and the Dean of Students each believed that the division's implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* could simultaneously improve practice, position the division to lead the institutional effort to assess student learning, and shore up support for programs and services. From the perspective of many professional staff in student affairs, the adoption of the document was viewed as an appropriate and timely response to the accreditation report's call to focus increased attention on the assessment of student learning.

Following the relatively inclusive adoption of *Learning Reconsidered* by the Vice President's council, the effort to put the recommendations into practice unfolded in a highly decentralized manner within the clusters and departments of the division. Initial reactions among the "homegrown" and moderately professionalized student affairs staff varied from significant excitement accompanied by a flurry of activity to modest support with little immediate focus on implementation. The response of mid-level professionals was frequently connected to their educational and professional background as well as their perception of the relevance and utility of the recommendations to their unit.

In the four years following the initial introduction of *Learning Reconsidered*, a number of departments at PSU received national recognition for their efforts. Vice President Van Galder believed that it was the good work of the senior-level staff in working individually with department-level directors that moved the process forward. Additional factors included accreditation being a common driver that maintained the focus on the professional staff, the consistent and persistent communication of its importance from key leaders, the granting of autonomy at the cluster and department-

level to implement in a manner that made good sense within individual units, the availability of expert support and professional development, senior leadership giving permission to try new things and take reasonable risks, the Dean of Students and others recognizing and celebrating the effort and success of those putting *Learning Reconsidered* into practice across the division. In the months following the accreditation visit, the immediacy to implement *Learning Reconsidered* had waned. This abrupt shift led a number of staff to question the long-term commitment in student affairs to focus on learning outcomes and assessment.

CHAPTER 6

High Plains University

Learning Reconsidered was introduced to the Division of Student Affairs at High Plains University [HPU] on two separate occasions. The first attempt to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice occurred near the end of the tumultuous tenure of an outgoing Vice President of Student Affairs and was short-lived. The second push to implement occurred a few years later and was prompted by a reintroduction of the document by Dr. Kacy Burton, the popular and well-respected Executive Director of Housing, Dining, and the Student Union. The ongoing implementation effort unfolded in the midst of HPU gearing up for accreditation and dovetailed with the division's reexamination of their organizational mission, vision, and values. Upon the second introduction, *Learning Reconsidered* was generally well-received by the directors and associate directors across the division who viewed it as a useful tool that could serve as a springboard for their development of learning outcomes. This case study will begin with an overview of the institution, continue with portrait of the student affairs division, and conclude with a discussion of the division-wide and department specific implementation efforts to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice at High Plains University.

Institutional Overview

High Plains University welcomed its initial cohort of 42 students to campus in the fall of 1884 when it opened its doors as the first college in the state. The university, located in the mountain west, has grown significantly since its founding and now educates nearly 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students in 86 bachelors, 66 masters, and 26 doctoral degree programs and its law and pharmacy schools. Well-established

programs in business, life sciences, natural resources, engineering, and an emerging focus in alternative energies are particularly popular among students.

The undergraduate population, many of whom are the first in their family to attend a college or university, is comprised primarily of students from the ranches and small communities that dot the landscape across the high plains and mountains of the state and its immediate neighbors. The students are described by the faculty and staff as hard working, respectful of authority, relatively well-behaved, and appreciative of the opportunities available to them. Students share that they are attracted to HPU because the campus is located in a pleasant college town of 27,000 with access to “the great outdoors” and the university’s reputation of providing a quality education with personal attention by friendly faculty and staff. Once students arrive on campus many quickly become involved in the 150 active student organizations, myriad athletic and cultural events, and institutional governance. The university website describes the institution in the following manner:

High Plains University stands at the forefront in the exploration of emerging technologies and concepts, giving our students the types of hands-on involvement and one-on-one attention rarely found at other colleges and universities. And we also continue to be recognized nationally as one of the best values in higher education.

Over the past number of years the campus underwent a significant facelift and remains abuzz with activity as older buildings are renovated and new buildings are constructed following an infusion of monies from the state and federal government. Included among the ongoing building projects are a renovated business school, an

updated residential dining facility, a facelift for the student union, a new health sciences center, renovated research and classroom buildings, and a planned state-of-the-art performing arts center. In spite of all the building, the campus maintains a friendly, small school feel and walking across it, passersby notice numerous interactions between students, faculty, and staff along tree-lined sidewalks or in the main quad known as “the pasture.”

Today, over 120 years after opening its doors, High Plains University remains the only four-year college in the state. As a result, the institution is frequently challenged to meet the expectation that it be “all things to all people” as it strives to fulfill multiple missions as a land grant college, research university, and access provider. Another outcome of being a “system of one” is that the culture and norms of the university are closely linked to the people and culture of the region. The Assistant Director of Residence Life described the connected cultures:

It [HPU] is a unique place and I realize that more and more as I started my doctoral program [at a neighboring institution]... as I’m explaining HPU, people are in awe. That we only have half a million people in the state, that we are the only state four-year institution, you know, all those pieces. So I think to really understand HPU you’ve got to understand the state. So I talk a lot about the egalitarianism of the state, the live-and-let-live philosophy of the state, and the whole pull yourself up by your bootstraps. You know, people here are fantastic about helping but you generally need to ask. They are not going to come to you so to speak. And you know, I always say they are so friendly and kind but a student of mine from a neighboring state said to me once, “It’s not that people from the

state are friendly, it's that they are lonely." And I think sometimes that might be part of it, too. You really have to be at peace with kind of being on your own and that rugged individualism comes through here. I think that all plays into the university.

Although individualism is valued, another component of the institutional culture noted by faculty, staff, and students is the highly relational nature of the campus community. The Associate Director of the Union shared his perspective on how to succeed as an administrator on campus:

You definitely have to build relationships. This is a very small state, we only have half a million people in the entire state and so, if you are at, if you are in a management position, it is very likely that you know multiple people around the state including the trustees and all that. So it is a little bit like social inbreeding in terms of networking and that kind of stuff.

The highly relational campus culture is further amplified by the informal interactions that are common among faculty and administrators living in a small, friendly western town over a long period of time. One mid-level academic affairs administrator stated:

Yeah, I have lived next door to the Associate Provost for 17 years and he has always been Wally. I know he is Dr. Anderson but he is just Wally. I have known Michael [the President] since our boys were in kindergarten together and he is just Michael.

These informal and longstanding relationships were noted as leading to a great deal of respect and trust existing among faculty and staff for one another.

In addition to their value of and personal respect for many of their colleagues on campus, the faculty and staff almost universally communicated a deep commitment to the institution and its advancement. For much of its first 100 years High Plains University was content to be a good school and focused on serving the needs of the state. However, under the leadership of its immediate past and current presidents, HPU began to believe that it could be an outstanding university and started implementing a planning process to achieve such a reputation. The Assistant Provost shared:

When my role in central administration began, and that also marks the time which, in my mind, that the university began, what I believe to be, a fairly steep upward climb as an institution of increased stature, as a higher education institution. That – that came about because of a president, because of a planning process that the president helped us learn how to do. It began – and it's now driven by institutional level plans.

Although the top-down implementation of the initial strategic planning process was widely challenged by faculty and staff as being pushed on them and generally non-inclusive, it resulted in a number of significant accomplishments and a noticeable shift in the culture of the institution to appreciate strategic planning. The Assistant Provost remarked:

One of the observations I made... was I think the best thing that came out of Academic Plan 1 [the initial strategic plan], of all the items that we accomplished, was that we as an institution began to realize that you can benefit from strong planning. It started to develop credibility for the institution with our legislators – the state's leadership, and it's still paying off today... So as I describe us now, as

we go into this Creation of the Future series, or Academic Plan 3, which we think will now be called University Plan 3... the planning processes have come together. So we're all trying to figure out how we do this together with academics still being the reason for being - but more as peers. We, as academics, we need the resources of administration, of facilities, of space, of buildings. We need support services for our students and our staff and counseling and all of those issues... That's how I describe the university, as it's driven by planning. It sets priorities by planning now.

Concurrent with the rise of strategic planning at High Plains University has been an increased focus on program reviews and institutional assessment, particularly at the college and department level within academic affairs. While the academic programs were developing learning outcomes and measures to assess them in response to a push from the regional accrediting group, student affairs departments were focusing their attention on the assessment of student satisfaction with their programs and services.

As various stakeholders at High Plains University embraced increasingly higher aspirations for the institution, the drive to push forward varied among administrators and faculty. The Associate Director of the Union captured the ongoing push-pull that continues to exist between the "old way of doing things" and the new way:

People here, I feel, are very dedicated to improving. But, a lot of people will say, "Well, this is the way it has always been done." And there is a little bit of that mentality but we also have a lot of forward thinkers and progressive thinkers. And so, you do kind of do battle... the progressive thinkers do a little bit of battle with

the “this is the way it has always been done” group, the “let’s not change anything” folks.

Student Affairs at High Plains University

The moderately sized, relatively complex, and increasingly professionalized Division of Student Affairs at High Plains University is populated by well-educated, highly committed, and pragmatic professionals who enjoy the place they work. The mission of the division was outlined in a campus publication:

The Division of Student Affairs is committed to the learning, success, wellness, and overall development of our students so that they may become informed and contributing citizens of their communities. Focusing on Students - First! Is the motto of the Division. We are focused on the success of HPU students as: (1) individuals prepared for continuous learning and attainment of professional goals; (2) members of a diverse, scholarly, and respectful community; and, (3) citizens, leaders, and productive members of our global society.

The degree to which staff members across the division believe in this mission is demonstrated by the large number who display the motto “Students-First!” on plaques in their offices and talk fluently of how the mission guides their work. A residence life staff member shared her perception of the organization after three years on campus:

I really think that we live the mission and the vision. And it comes out in everything we do, which I think is very unique. Coming from a larger school, there are more people that interact here. But I think there is something about the HPU way of being set up, they really want students to succeed. And that is at the core of everything that we do and everyone bonds around that mission. And it

really works. And people really love it here... There is just this deep love for HPU and that helps drive everything that we do.

Another reason cited by a number of student affairs professionals that they enjoyed working at HPU was the support they feel to take risks and implement new ideas, even if their initial attempts were not immediately successful. The Assistant Director of Residence Life stated:

My experience with things that haven't worked or haven't gone flawlessly has been absolute support from the administration. Never once have I heard, "Well, we didn't think that was going to work but we thought we would let you try it," those types of things. And we get support for those things that we thought needed to happen. Do we need to pour more money into this? Do we need to discontinue doing it? How do we revise it? Does it need to be a partnership? Just a variety of different things; the support is absolutely there to keep pushing through.

The division is organized into three clusters – Wellness, Enrollment Management, and Housing, Dining, and the Student Union. Each cluster is coordinated by an executive director or associate vice president who reports directly to the vice president. The Wellness Cluster is led by Jesse Fox, the Dean of Students, and consists of Campus Recreation, Student Health Services, Counseling Center, and the Dean of Students Office. The Enrollment Management Cluster consists of Admissions, Financial Aid, Student Educational Opportunity [SEO], Registrar, and the Center for Advising and Career Services. The final cluster is composed of Housing, Dining and the Student Union and led by Dr. Kacy Burton. Burton arrived at HPU after spending much of her early career at her alma mater in the east. She is appreciated by her staff for her expertise,

support, and commitment to students and is respected campus-wide for her work ethic, drive, awareness of national best practices, and collegueship.

The student affairs division is led by Dr. Katrina Arneson, the former Vice President of Enrollment Management at High Plains University. The Assistant Director of Residence Life described Arneson by stating, “You know, she is, wow, just a mover and a shaker, that is all there is to it. And just a person that is looking out for the students.” Arneson’s leadership style was captured by the Dean of Students:

Our Vice President is very collaborative... she’s not top-down. She doesn’t say, “You gotta do this.” She says, “Well, whatever works.” She’s very positive, and she is also quick to recognize when she’s not in an area that she is comfortable with. She allows other people to have their skill sets, so it’s a very, for lack of a better way of saying it, very collaborative.

Since Arneson assumed the vice presidency, many entry- and mid-level student affairs professionals remarked that they felt increasingly trusted, valued, and capable of contributing to the future direction of the organization. A veteran residence life professional shared:

She really values what we have to say, where we live, what we do and she does not have a residence life background but she considers us the subject experts in what we do. And, she listens to us. It is kind of remarkable to be listened to and remembered at the level we are at and really get to contribute to where we are headed and the things we are going to do.

Although the student affairs division has a proud history of contributing to the quality of the student experience at High Plains University, its record of collaboration

with academic administrators and connection to the academic mission has fluctuated over time. The shift of the division to being an organization intent on collaborating with academic administrators and faculty to directly support the academic mission – and student learning - began approximately 35 years ago with the hiring of Bill Gullickson as the then Dean of Students and senior student affairs officer. Vice President Arneson reflected:

I think the evolution began, our former student affairs VP, Bill, you know, started here in the mid-1970s. He reported to the Provost at that time and then ultimately evolved into the VP of Student Affairs. Before that time there wasn't as close a relationship, but he had a faculty appointment so he saw the connections.

Gullickson recognized that in order to enhance the division's relationship to the academic mission, it was essential to create opportunities for student affairs staff and administrators from the academic side of the house to come together to discuss issues affecting students. Kacy Burton reflected:

Yeah, we had a rich history of joint academic/student affairs collaboration... the article that the Assistant to the Vice President authored with Bill in the 1980s about a major initiative [that is now the Associate Deans and Student Affairs Directors Group]. At the time it was a committee. At the time it was the deans and student affairs directors but it eventually became associate deans and it is going through its own growing pains and changing pains now. But it was a profound committee to bring directors and deans to talk through joint issues 20 years ago.

During Gullickson's tenure the commitment to collaboration permeated student and academic affairs and resulted in numerous successful joint initiatives. However, at

the same time cross-divisional cooperation was increasing, collaboration remained sparse between departments within student affairs. During this period the unwritten agreement among directors was “you do your thing, I’ll do mine” and as a result, the division operated in a relatively “siloed” manner with significant competition among departments for limited resources.

Following Gullickson’s retirement the division was briefly led by Sally Pringle, a vice president described as “having her own agenda” who tried unsuccessfully to implement a number of “outside ideas.” Although perceived as quite bright, Pringle was also noted as being less gifted at building collaborative relationships than her predecessor. Her leadership of the division resulted in increased decentralization, further competition among directors, decreased collaboration, and waning credibility for student affairs in the eyes of the upper administration and faculty. The current Director of the Freshman Interest Groups noted, “I think we went from a very strong leader to one that disseminated a lot and wasn’t very successful, truthfully, back to a pretty strong leader in Katrina. I think she is a very cohesive person.”

Serving as the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management during this rocky period, and being deeply committed to collaboration, Katrina Arneson recognized the importance of repairing the strained relationships when she stepped into the vice presidency. Arneson stated:

So much of what we do is relationship driven on our campus. There are so many good relationships... We’ve gotta work together... You know, Kacy and I want to have good relationships and we don’t want to have them deteriorate and the long term support for everything we do hinges on how willing we are to work with

other people. You know, and be good players. And follow through and do our part.

Vice President Arneson's relational leadership style and commitment to collaboration resulted in higher morale within student affairs and increased respect among key allies in academic affairs. The Assistant Provost commented, "My attitude has been cemented by the fact that the more I work with student affairs professionals, and realized that they are professionals, the easier it is to work with them." The culture of collaboration at the vice president and assistant provost level continues to spread throughout the institution. The Director of the Freshman Interest Groups shared:

I think that it [culture of collaboration] is very top-down from my perspective, I think it has to come from the top ... I think there are people at the VP level that got along, had a common goal, and worked together and you know that culture just does spread down. And once it starts to spread down you know and it gets into your soul as a line-level person, it is really hard to pull that back out again so I think there is a lot of relationships that were built with the director of housing and the coordinator of living learning communities that were in residence life, you know, once you get to know those people and work with those people, those relationships are established and they stay.

In addition to the revived culture of collaboration, former Vice President Gullickson's early commitment to connect student affairs to the academic mission of the institution resulted in student learning remaining a priority for many in the division. Ted Dewey, the Director of Residence Life, recognized this commitment when he arrived on campus approximately eight years earlier:

When I got here what I noticed was there was a cadre of individuals across the division that were talking this way [about student learning]. And they were talking a little bit more sophisticated than we had been as my former institution. The kinds of questions they were approaching was, “How can we actually tie the curriculum itself to the residential experience?” ... They had administrators, not just in student affairs but in academic affairs, who were having this conversation. They had each found each other and were talking. Clearly, Dr. Burton was one of the leading parties in that cadre of individuals.

The ongoing conversations between Kacy Burton and others in student affairs and a number of faculty colleagues and academic administrators led to several successful joint learning-centered initiatives including the development of residential learning communities beginning in 1998 and the creation of the Student Success Center in 2003. Each of these initiatives was an outgrowth of a team of faculty and administrators coming together to improve the undergraduate student experience at HPU. Executive Director Burton reflected, “There were certainly some growing pains with that... part of how these initiatives were was getting people to the table, talking about the issues, collaborating, disagreeing, coming up with a game plan.” Burton described how one of these efforts unfolded:

A bunch of us went to Evergreen College for the Learning Communities Institute. I’m trying to remember what that was – we had a team of five. And then we threw together the learning community initiative, sort of started focusing on those efforts. We had a site team visit with folks. All of this was kind of rolling then academic affairs shifted gears a little bit moving towards assessment of student

learning in the classroom so Wally's [the Assistant Provost] focus shifted and it, it wasn't like we walked away. We did some things. We had a couple things going. And they were focused on assessment at the department level in academic affairs and then in residence life we were getting into renovations and we couldn't guarantee growth. So anyhow, we had a ton of momentum and a lot of people at the table and good things happened and we kind of maintained I guess but then the focus shifted a little bit.

It was soon after the shift within academic affairs towards the development and assessment of student learning outcomes at the department level, driven by a push from the regional accrediting group, that *Learning Reconsidered* was initially introduced at High Plains State University. The remainder of this case study provides an overview of top-down process by which key recommendations in *Learning Reconsidered* were implemented in the student affairs division.

Implementing Learning Reconsidered at High Plains University

Learning Reconsidered was introduced on two separate occasions in the Division of Student Affairs at High Plains University. The initial push to use it as a guiding document was made soon after its publication in 2004. Sally Pringle, the Vice President who preceded Katrina Arneson, was among a group of student affairs professionals from HPU at a conference when it was released by the professional associations. Kacy Burton, another attendee, recalled, "I know that when it came out, they launched it at either ACPA or NASPA. I remember going to a session and we got a free copy." Soon after Pringle returned from the conference, and near the end of her tenure as vice president, she shared copies of *Learning Reconsidered* with a couple of her colleagues in academic

affairs who recall that they “skimmed” it. She also purchased copies for a number of her senior professional staff in the student affairs division; few remember it being a focus of conversations. Katrina Arneson, the current Vice President of Student Affairs, reflected on why she believed the initial introduction failed to gain traction:

Well, we were transitioning VPs right about the time it came out. We were almost trying to reestablish credibility for student affairs right during that time frame. We had a VP after Bill Gullickson who had all the great ideas, no question. She [Pringle] was extremely bright but she probably wasn’t as successful as she could have been here and with *Learning Reconsidered*. More over personal dynamics... but it wasn’t that she didn’t have all the great ideas. But, so when *Learning Reconsidered* came out we weren’t in the position to say, “Come on everybody. Come, let’s talk about this. Let’s bring in some authors and let’s you know.”

As a result of the timing and circumstances surrounding the initial introduction, any efforts to implement the document and its recommendations were limited to grass roots efforts by a handful of individuals that remained localized within individual departments.

Among the early adopting student affairs professionals at High Plains University who began to consider how they might use the document to guide their practice were Kacy Burton, Ted Dewey, Katrina Arneson, Jesse Fox, and the Registrar. Jesse Fox recalled his reaction to reading *Learning Reconsidered* the first time:

It felt like it was, I was singing its song or it was singing my song or we were singing in harmony. It was like learning is what we do, and hands on and have people experience that learning is really how things change... It was synchronistic because when I read *Learning Reconsidered* it was like, “Duh. Of course this is

what you do. This is how you do it. I mean, you – learning is a process, and you have to start where people are and you help them move along you respect their right to wherever they are, but then you bring them along.” So I... I just heard them putting to word, putting to paper, saw them putting to paper what a lot of us have been doing for a long time in health promotion, in counseling, in just practitioner oriented learning. So I just thought it was home, like, “Good, I’m glad somebody wrote a book,” but it was like a lot of us had been singing in harmony for some time.

Katrina Arneson added that beyond the core ideas in *Learning Reconsidered* (e.g., calls for collaboration between academic and student affairs, increased focus on student learning, and the call to develop and assess learning outcomes) resonating on a personal level with numerous student affairs professionals at High Plains University, the document also aligned with the division’s ongoing focus of promoting holistic student learning via increased collaboration with their colleagues in academic affairs. Arneson commented:

Learning Reconsidered sort of captured what we were trying to accomplish anyway. So it was nice to see the theoretical pieces to validate us... but, it wasn’t as if there was an epiphany... I mean all of our efforts – tying into the faculty, tying into how we can work better with our collaborative partners on the academic side to pull off things. How we work with students and how we can make that richer. But I definitely wouldn’t say that *Learning Reconsidered* was some kind of catalyst.

Although little was done to drive the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* division-wide following its initial introduction, a number of staff members began discussing how the document might inform their practice, services, and programs. The

remainder of this case study provides a portrait of the implementation process that unfolded division-wide and within various departments in student affairs at High Plains University following the documents reintroduction.

Reintroducing Learning Reconsidered – Bowling Together

The second effort to introduce *Learning Reconsidered* division-wide occurred as two significant events were unfolding at High Plains University. First, the division of student affairs was struggling through the process of redefining itself after the rocky tenure of then former Vice President Sally Pringle. Second, HPU was gearing up for its re-accreditation and increasingly focused on assessment, in particular trying to document student learning. Although the student affairs division had long been committed to assessment, it had not initially followed the lead of the academic side of the house in defining learning outcomes and developing measures to assess the impact of their programs and services on student learning. This began to shift in the wake of a visit from the regional accrediting group in preparation for their upcoming visit when one of the accreditors commented that each person working at HPU should be prepared to answer the question, “So, how do you contribute to student learning at High Plains University?” For a number of professionals in student affairs, this was a call-to-action to think seriously about their impact on student learning.

In the midst of these events, the senior leadership of the division held a retreat during the fall of 2006 to take stock of who they were as an organization and where they were headed in the future. It was near the end of this retreat that *Learning Reconsidered* was reintroduced by Kacy Burton as a tool to help them begin to collectively think about how to move forward in promoting student learning and creating and measuring learning

outcomes. From the very beginning of the effort, Vice President Arneson took on the role of champion and supporter but stepped aside to allow Kacy Burton and others to lead the conversations. Arneson reflected, “When there are certain topics some people have a better voice on it - like learning outcomes. Kacy is the better voice to lead discussions... Kacy articulates it so much better than I do.” Burton and the Registrar pieced together their shared memories of retreat:

I’m trying to remember how the whole learning outcome thing unfolded from the very, very beginning. I mean, I think we had talked a little bit about student learning in the division, but it was still really kind of out there, and then the first time we really tried to tackle some things was that retreat when we went bowling. When we were down in a conference room and we asked the basic question, “What do we want our students to leave here with?” And that’s kind of what, that was kind of the first pass at putting some things down. And right before that we had gone to work on our mission statement and our goals... We had revamped our, everything. And so I think there was a – we focused on mission, vision, goals, and then we led right into, into learning. Learning as though it’s like, “Okay, here are our goals. Here’s our vision and our mission. How do we accomplish that?” And so it really nicely dovetailed into that... we had a lot of new leadership at the table too ‘cause we had – I mean we had a ton of new directors... So yeah, we had had a lot of transition about, starting about two years ago maybe, and so that was all part of the, “Okay, let’s regroup. Let’s figure out where we are. Let’s figure out where we need to start focusing.” And then we

brought these learning concepts to the table. That's when we handed out *Learning Reconsidered* too.

Near the end of the retreat, a sheet was sent around the room and each director and associate director in attendance was asked to sign up if they wished to receive a copy of *Learning Reconsidered* that they could use as a reference; nearly everyone did.

Although *Learning Reconsidered* was shared as a resource with the senior leadership of the division, and many of the directors then provided copies for the mid- and entry-level staff in their departments, little specific attention was paid to the philosophical or theoretical components of the document. The Associate Director of the Union noted:

You know, in my experience, I don't think we have said, "Based on *Learning Reconsidered* we are doing x, y, and z." I think that we have just been doing it but not talking about a theoretical base as to why we are doing what we are doing.

One reason shared for the lack of focus on the theoretical and philosophical components of the document was that the student affairs division at High Plains University was filled with "a pragmatic bunch of professionals" who were committed to improving their contribution to student learning and its assessment but not necessarily to *Learning Reconsidered* itself. In addition, after watching the previous Vice President's attempts to implement new programs at HPU, Burton and Arneson understood that the culture of the division often resisted the introduction of outside ideas. Burton shared:

I think our culture here, a big part of our culture, is the, I mean, we do things our own way on this campus. It is the High Plains experience. And I think, you know, somebody goes to a conference and gets an idea and comes back and says, "I just learned how to do this and I think I'll try it." It would completely hit the wall.

Another value that guided Burton and Arneson's leadership during the implementation effort was their commitment to allowing directors the space and freedom to take risks when developing and implementing learning outcomes. Burton commented:

I think that learning outcomes is a great example. It is one of those things – first of all there is not a magical – this is what is must be. It is so nebulous and it is so tailored to our campus. So, to launch something like that that is nebulous, some of the directors are black and white oriented whereas others appreciate the ambiguity and I think those that have tended to jump on earlier are more those that can appreciate the ambiguity and can apply it... Again, there is no right or wrong way.... It is ok to screw up. We aren't going to tell you to screw up but try things, take risks and you know if we get to a place where we look at our learning outcomes and wonder what in the world we were thinking that is ok. We'll back it up and try again. So, I think that safe space on campus is really important too.

In the weeks following the initial retreat during which learning outcomes and *Learning Reconsidered* were reintroduced, the directors and associate directors met on multiple occasions to begin answering the question originally posed, "What do we want our students to leave here with?" During these meetings the directors generated a list of approximately 20 outcomes that were then handed off to a smaller group of self-selected staff members coordinated by Kacy Burton. This group was charged with paring the larger list down to a more manageable set of outcomes. The Registrar, a member of the smaller work group, provided a synopsis of the process:

There was a vision. It was kind of out there, not very tangible. Then there was a menu where we listed all the different outcomes. Then there was the group that

boiled it all down to the ones that we were going to use. Then we planned a road map of how we were going to get there.

In an effort to bolster their implementation effort, three members of the small work group attended a NASPA assessment conference. While there, they developed an increasingly complex and concrete understanding of how to write assessable learning outcomes. One of the attendees reflected, “So we spent, I mean it was arduous, but we spent time – it was in St. Louis just cranking on trying to define what these were.” Following their return from the conference the smaller group completed their work and shared the draft outcomes with the full director’s council who adjusted and approved the final set of eight learning outcomes. Once adopted, the director’s council defined each learning outcome, unveiled them to the remainder of the student affairs division, and set the expectation that each department think about how they contributed to these outcomes and their assessment. The Assistant to the Vice President stated:

So in a sense it was top-down in that it came from the directors’ council level. We provided some detail as to what kind of activities we thought would support each of them – the learning outcomes... And we got into recognizing and celebrating our differences and similarities. We gave some examples of events, programming, things of that type so that units didn’t have to go in blind but could start to think, “Maybe I don’t do that quite like the counseling center does but I do something else that could support that particular outcome.”

The reaction varied significantly among the directors in the division to the increased push to focus on learning outcomes and assessment. The Dean of Students summarized:

One reaction was, “Ah, there’s another one of those things that they’re coming from the outside with, and we don’t need that. We’re ok here,” which is kind of a defensive response. Another reaction is, my reaction was more, “Well, gosh. Looks like we’re doing what we need to be doing.” Some people were put off by the assessment of learning outcomes perspective. “Oh no, we got a test tomorrow.” There were lots of different responses too. I think it depends on how people felt like it was, if they thought it was forced upon them. But I didn’t ever feel that way. I always felt like it was, “Here’s a document that talks about a process that I think we’ve been doing, and we can always do better.” And learning outcomes are another way to do that and defining goals, and defining the target is always a good idea so you can know when you missed the target or you hit the target.

Once the outcomes were adopted and the directors were charged with department-level implementation, a few steps were taken to push the effort forward. First, Burton recommended and Arneson ultimately decided to adjust the annual report to include a section asking each director to identify which learning outcomes their department would work on in the upcoming year and to then follow-up in future reports with their progress in the previous year. A number of directors shared that this prompted them to begin discussions among their staff related to learning outcomes more quickly than would have otherwise been the case. At this point in the implementation process Burton recalled that the group was unsure of what to do next. She reflected:

When we had finalized the outcomes... and all the directors agreed on the definitions and everything we kind of laid it out there. We... incorporated it in our

planning documents, our annual reporting documents... And so, there was a sense that even though we had done this there was still this, “Oh my gosh, now what?” kind of thing going on. And then the Registrar came into one of the staff meetings, I think it was either late summer or in the fall possibly, just with talking about some of the things that she had been working on with this retreat and mapping things out. You know, when you look at your registrar’s office, and again service function versus a programmatic function, and they’ve come up with all these creative ideas in terms of how you can try to get your arms around some of this stuff. I mean it was definitely – I think it was a big moment within the division because I think it made it very tangible for people, and it made it, “Oh my gosh, if the registrar’s office can do this and I’m doing programs maybe I should be able to assess the outcome of those programs or at least identify what we’re trying to accomplish with them.” So it was a big deal, it was a really big deal and it was early.

As the implementation effort evolved beyond developing division-wide outcomes, the small work group continued to meet to provide support and guidance to their colleagues. Unsure of what was needed by the staff, they administered a survey to the directors and associate directors asking what resources and support they needed to be successful in their department-level implementation efforts. The information gleaned from the survey led to a series of additional mechanisms being put in place to further the implementation process. Support mechanisms included ongoing division-wide conversations at the director’s council that focused on fostering mutual support rather than competition or shaming, the availability of workshops from education faculty on

survey construction, consulting with the Student Affairs Assessment Committee, contracting Student Voice to provide survey software and consultation, offers by senior leadership to facilitate brainstorming sessions within departments, and developing a rubric to help each department ascertain where they were in the implementation process and how they might move forward. Burton described how the rubric came about:

The directors applied them [learning outcomes] to their annual reports. Some directors did, and they came up with measurements. Some directors didn't even mention them. And so, we put a little rubric together... so if you were here [early implementation]... and we gave an example. It is just acknowledging that taking time is ok. It is ok to take time. Because we all want to get it done. And you don't have to do it this year. You can start small, see how it goes.

The Director of the Recreation Center reflected on his reaction to the ongoing implementation process and the continued push within the division to move the effort along:

I think instead of just putting it – put it on your plate and saying, “Here’s *Learning Reconsidered*, go out and find your way,” they’ve kind of done – she [Burton] has championed and... she’s guided us and maybe at times she’s pushed us to let’s get this. And it’s been a good process that way to have someone who really buys into it, really.

Finally, although Vice President Arneson stepped aside from leading the push to implement learning outcomes, she signaled her ongoing commitment to the effort by including it as a consistent agenda item at division-wide meetings as well as by providing ample resources to support implementation. Arneson also continued to cultivate

collaboration rather than competition among the staff. Consequently, she created the space in the meetings and retreats for the directors to celebrate their successes and coach one another as they navigated the challenges they faced. The Director of Admissions shared:

There's rarely a directors meeting that goes by without us talking about this in some way, not large, you know, no reinventing it every time, but I mean we really do now constantly talk about learning outcomes. It's part of our annual reports now. We address how we're in fact addressing learning outcomes or – so that's been good.

The Coordinator of Alcohol Education Initiatives and the Dean of Students jointly reflected on the difference between the first and second attempts to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice:

I think the previous vice president, whether she was or not – I won't get into if it's true and what's not true – was seen as furthering her own personal agenda, and people pushed back on that. Whereas now people are saying, people are doing this because they want to do it, and it's the right thing to do, and it works. So it's not agenda driven anymore. It's because it's a good idea, and this works. I think people have reframed it, reframed learning objectives, learning outcomes, data-based decision making in such a way that people are going, "Oh." But it's the same thing; it's just how it's provided to people. Yeah, I think that it's been presented in a really positive way, not necessarily as far as, "Well, this is something more that you have to do," as opposed to we're just enhancing what we're already doing a little bit, but it's not a whole new – we don't have to totally

change everything we're doing. It's just looking at what we're already doing and then saying, "Okay, are there some things... some certain points where we can measure at to help us improve?" And so I think it's been communicated really well in that sense, and that's probably why there's been some pretty good buy-in at the staff level that I've seen.

Implementing Learning Reconsidered in the Departments

In addition to the implementation effort that unfolded among directors and associate directors resulting in the creation of learning outcomes for the student affairs division, the key recommendations in *Learning Reconsidered* were also put into practice within a number of student affairs departments at High Plains University. The timing and process of how department-level implementation unfolded varied significantly. In some units implementation occurred simultaneous to the division-wide effort, in others the division-wide effort served as an impetus for implementation within the individual department, and in still others little effort was made to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Additionally, while some departments used the document as a tool to develop learning outcomes, others focused solely on the recommendations and never shared *Learning Reconsidered* widely with mid- and entry-level staff. This section of the case study will examine the implementation process within three representative departments: Residence Life, Admissions, and Student Educational Opportunity.

Residence Life – Early adoption over coffee. The Department of Residence Life at High Plains University is nested within a cluster that includes Housing, Dining, and the Student Union. The department is led by Ted Dewey, a professional long-committed to promoting best practices related to student learning in residential settings. The well-

educated and highly professionalized residence life staff includes an assistant director, four coordinators, graduate hall directors, and paraprofessional staff. The staff has garnered a reputation for supporting the academic mission of HPU including collaborating with faculty and academic affairs colleagues to create a number of living learning communities. Additionally, the department of residence life has a long history of using surveys to assess student satisfaction with their programs and services.

The implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* in residence life occurred simultaneous to the division-wide process that unfolded following the document's reintroduction. Kacy Burton and Ted Dewey, two of the early adopters of *Learning Reconsidered*, introduced the document to their staff soon after it was released in 2004. As Dewey considered how to put the document into practice, he recognized that although he was capable of writing an implementation plan, it would ultimately be the front-line staff that determined the success of the effort. Dewey shared, "For me, it was not about a specific plan for implementing learning outcomes... the people that I had to convince was the live-in staff." One of the initial challenges Dewey and Burton faced was shifting the mindset of the area coordinators away from focusing solely on promoting student development in the residence halls and towards focusing on student learning. Burton shared that being patient and having repeated conversations to coach her mid- and entry-level staff to expand their focus was essential to laying the groundwork for implementation. She commented:

There was still a perception that is dominant. I saw it with our area coordinators and their perception of the role of student affairs with student development and student learning. Are we here to support student learning or are we here to support

student development? A kind of divisiveness a little bit. Just... it is just having conversations again and again and development is part of it as well.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, Dewey began asking the coordinators to examine how they could incorporate *Learning Reconsidered* into their work. Dewey shared how the implementation effort began:

Now, could I have sat down, drawn out the whole master plan, and presented it to them? Absolutely I could have. No, I deliberately chose not to do that. Instead, I wanted them to come up with how to do it. So that meant I had to get them to talk in that way. Well you know we bought everybody copies of *Learning Reconsidered*. We bought them all copies of *Learning Reconsidered 2*. I think we bought 'em all copies of last one that came out... We bought 'em copies of all of them. Here, read this and let's talk. How many conversations? I lost count. Broad, general conversations, one-on-one conversations, staff meeting conversations. And I think it probably took me a year to make them all understand that this was not gonna go away. That we were gonna do this. That this was how we were gonna think about this in the future. And to let them know that we can do this, this is not impossible; you don't already have to have your PhD. You know, we can do this. This is doable. And it doesn't have to be perfect the first time and we don't have to publish our stuff the first time out or whatever. We can take baby steps and it'll be okay and what do you think? What do you think is the best way for all of you to do this? And each of those conversations very gradually and slowly got more sophisticated.

The coordinators recall these conversations pushing them to incorporate learning outcomes while also providing the space they needed to question everything they were doing in the residence halls. A coordinator reflected:

What I remember was several meetings where we continued to say, “How do we make learning outcomes an integral part of everything we do?” And that continues, I mean, two years later it still stays on the agenda, “How are we using learning outcomes? How are we assessing what we do? How is this woven into the thread of everything we do, not just a box we check?” So, it was basically Ted handing us the books and telling us we needed to read them and be familiar with the whole concept and to start incorporating into everything we did.

The Assistant Director of Residence Life added:

I think all of us in residence life have gotten on board. It has taken awhile but people have finally realized that it is not going away. You are going to get this or you are going to move along because this is a value of our department.

By the summer of 2007 the coordinators were pushing forward with developing learning outcomes for residence life and began convening for a series of meetings to discuss how to move forward with implementation. A coordinator shared their process:

It started with a light bulb going off when we realized that we are not doing what we should be doing. There was some meetings and some thinking and some planning with some coffee involved and some writing and lots of, “Mmm, how the hell should we do this?”...so we just sat down and started brainstorming what we thought was important and the things for students to experience living in the residence halls... And so, at one point, I shared my experience at a previous

institution where we had a programming model that had five components to it and we kind of talked about each of those and that kind of encompassed what we want to do, but we don't want to do it the exact way.

During these summer-long conversations, the four coordinators brought in ideas they gathered from attending conference presentations or gleaned from examining initiatives underway in residence life departments at other colleges and universities that had previously incorporated learning outcomes. By the end of the summer the coordinators had developed and defined five learning outcomes, a plan to introduce them to graduate and paraprofessional staff during fall training, and began to consider how to measure their effectiveness. Just as the coordinators were finalizing the outcomes they developed for residence life, the division-wide outcomes were shared with them. The Assistant Director of Residence Life, then a coordinator, commented on her reaction:

We did our process before we heard about the division outcomes. And when the division outcomes came out we realized that we were there, we were doing what they wanted us to do so we didn't have to tweak it which is nice... I think everybody was really and almost thankful to have some kind of guidance if that makes sense. Again, I think everybody was kind of working on their own and I think it has been through *Learning Reconsidered* and the outcomes of student affairs and all those pieces that we have finally felt like there is some congruence.

The initial year of implementation in residence life was particularly challenging for the paraprofessional staff. In response to these challenges, the coordinators spent the next summer redesigning various components of the residence life program to further align them with the focus on student learning including changes to how paraprofessional

staff were hired, trained, and evaluated, the type of professional development provided to graduate and paraprofessional staff, the format and focus of the weekly reports, and the committee structure within the department. The Assistant Director of Residence Life reflected:

We thought a lot about the merits about how do we set this up for the RAs.

Because how they understand and why do they care about learning outcomes because, in truth, they are short-timers and you know, you've got to make it of value to them and you've got to make them feel like that this is making my job better. This is making my relationship with students better.

In reflecting on the implementation of learning outcomes the coordinators noted a number of factors that supported their implementation effort. The first factor was that the implementation of learning outcomes was encouraged within the division from the vice president down to the director of residence life. One coordinator shared:

We were encouraged at every level to examine what we were doing and make sure it was what we really thought was the right thing to do and if you don't get that encouragement, no matter how many coffeehouse discussions you have nothing will change. We were told, "Tell us what we need to be doing and we'll look it over with you and if we think it is a good direction to go you've got our backing," and that was actually true.

Other factors the coordinators cited as supporting their implementation efforts were financial support to attend conferences where they were able to gather resources, Ted Dewey providing them the time and space to develop outcomes that they believed in and a plan to implement them, the trust and respect they had for each other as

collaborators, and working in a culture in residence life and student affairs in which assessment was a growing expectation. When the coordinators struggled with how to measure the effectiveness of their efforts, they admitted “biggest sticking point,” they asked for and received additional support in the form of Student Voice, a consulting company specializing in facilitating student affairs professionals’ assessment of student learning.

By the beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year, the residence life staff was on the cusp of their second year of the full-scale implementation of learning outcomes. With residence life charging ahead on their implementation efforts, they were being used as a model by other departments in the student affairs division of how to put learning outcomes into practice.

Student Educational Opportunity – It just fit. Student Educational Opportunity [SEO] at High Plains University comprises a number of programs and initiatives focused on promoting student access to the institution and nurturing student success once they arrive. Key functions of the unit include Disability Resources, Upward Bound, McNair, and GEAR-Up. The office is led by Nancy Lander, a highly collaborative professional who possesses significant experience working with grant-funded programs that require a commitment to setting specific programmatic outcomes and an ability to assess success. In addition to Nancy, the department is staffed by an associate director and a number of professionals with variable educational backgrounds and experiences. Nancy described the organizational structure as “totally flat, we all just sort of make decisions together on most things – everyone’s lateral.”

The implementation of learning outcomes in SEO began after the division-wide outcomes were completed. The Associate Director shared, “It began with the division developing learning outcomes together and then we started working within our department to decide how we were going to contribute to the outcomes.” Lander added:

Well, it was really pushed from the top. And we all knew accreditation was there so that kept our attention and Kacy really just kept asking us to really think about how we know what we think we know and wouldn’t it be cool to get a better idea of what the impact was.

From the outset of their conversations about incorporating division-wide learning outcomes into the work of SEO, Lander shared that she “felt really little resistance because we are used to collecting data and doing outcomes because of the soft-money thing.” Because of the comfort many professionals in the department already had with measuring the impact of their programs, little time was needed to “sell” learning outcomes or the importance of implementation to the staff. The Assistant Director shared, “We were already really doing a lot of this so it just fit with all that, so once we had time to do it, it was fine.” Reflecting on factors that supported the implementation process in SEO, Lander shared that the availability of the Student Affairs Assessment Committee to help construct surveys allowed the staff to put some assessment strategies in place quickly and then having time with the full staff to work as a group to discuss how to move forward and make collective decisions was particularly important.

Admissions – Considering reconsidering. The Office of Admissions at High Plains University is nested in the Enrollment Management Cluster and is composed of a director, two associate directors, multiple assistant directors, and numerous admissions

counselors and support staff. The primary responsibilities of the unit include student recruitment, outreach to the community colleges and high schools in the state, overseeing the admissions process, and coordinating summer orientation and registration. The admissions office is led by John Hiatt, a High Plains alumnus with no formal educational preparation in student affairs or higher education. Hiatt described himself as a “team player” and a “nuts and bolts kind of guy.” Hiatt reflected on his introduction to *Learning Reconsidered*:

I don’t remember how it was pitched necessarily, but I do recall when we first started talking about it and I recall that the Vice President handed out the *Learning Reconsidered* books and so forth and I remember pulling out the CAS [Council for the Advancement of Standards] standards and those sorts of things and said, “Okay, well what does that mean for us over here?”

Hiatt shared that once the division-wide outcomes were finalized, an “assignment” was given to the directors in student affairs that they begin to think about how the outcomes “might fit into” their individual offices. In the case of the admissions office, this resulted in the director spending time on his own thinking about how to put learning outcomes into practice. Although supportive of the overall effort, Hiatt noted that implementing learning outcomes had been difficult:

I think... it’s the Enrollment Management Cluster that isn’t quite there... And I don’t know, you know, just some of the learning outcomes are just, I think, tougher to grasp in the real process oriented services... the learning outcomes piece is real abstract... so it’s harder. That’s not how my mind works so it’s harder for me to talk about what we do with my associate directors in those

terms... it's a little easier when it comes to orientation because that's, you know, that's the transition piece... And I'll be honest, I'm still kind of struggling with it. I get it, but I don't – I haven't trained my mind to think, "Okay, how does this process teach a student to evaluate his or her own purpose or personal responsibility."

Although the admissions office lagged in their efforts to incorporate learning outcomes into their programs, Hiatt shared that they used the division-wide outcomes to guide, to some degree, a recent decision-making process related to the role of parents in the summer orientation and registration process. Hiatt stated:

Now, whether or not we did this because we said, "Oh, we're going to address learning outcomes and here's how we're going to do it," or if it was, "We want to do this and oh yeah, that's supported by." It's probably the latter, but in orientation, we – traditionally parents have been able to go to student advising appointments with the student and we – I think we all felt in our heart that that's not good because that's not how it's gonna happen in the future and we know students need to learn it and understand it and we know that parents need to let go... We did a little bit of research with other schools to make sure that we're not totally off our rocker... But, you know, so we did then say, "Hey, you know, we're trying to teach personal responsibility. We're trying to help parents let go and so this makes a lot of sense. We're just doing it." So that's one area I guess, for me at least, that I know, you know a learning outcome was really thought about in making our decisions.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

By the close of the summer of 2008, the student affairs staff at High Plains University had made significant progress taking many of the key recommendations of *Learning Reconsidered* and putting them into practice as evidenced by the institution being highlighted on the *Learning Reconsidered* website. In addition to the division-wide development of learning outcomes, multiple departments were striving to connect their work to these outcomes and adjust their programs and services accordingly. Two other ongoing initiatives stemming from the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* were the emerging division-wide focus on the assessment of student learning and further invigoration of collaborative, learning-centered initiatives between academic and student affairs.

With the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* well underway, Kacy Burton reflected on the process:

You know, I think on the national scene there was a lot of this going on in terms of the dialogue within student affairs, within housing... I think those of us who are going out to meetings and things are seeing this evolving. It really was just bringing some of that back to the table for the conversations here. Katrina's been very supportive. I think – she's been supportive since the day she stepped on campus, not just in the VP role, you know, what are these outcomes and how do we contribute to that? So I think it was just the jelling of lots of different factors. I don't think there was any one thing that pushed or ramrodded it. Just the culture's evolving, and we jumped on board.

The Assistant to the Vice President concurred in large part with Burton and added his perspective on how the implementation effort unfolded:

I'm not aware of a very conscientious effort to introduce *Learning Reconsidered* to this campus. I think more of what has happened is a result of people going to conferences and individually becoming aware of *Learning Reconsidered* specifically and similar processes and bring those back to campus and implementing them without actually hanging the title *Learning Reconsidered* on them... So it has trickled down throughout the various professionals within student affairs. Our implementation has been more understated, maybe not directly intended to implement *Learning Reconsidered* but certainly recognizing the positive aspects of that concept and responding in that way to it.

For mid-level professionals in student affairs, the top-down push to focus on student learning and implement learning outcomes shifted how they think about their job. The Associate Director of the Union stated, "In the last few years we now really think about trying things that impact student learning and student development." The Assistant Director of Residence Life added her perspective on how *Learning Reconsidered* contributed to the ongoing shift in the culture among student affairs professionals:

I think it is a guide for us. To be able to say read that and say, "Look at what everyone else is going, how can we do better?" So I think it is just that resource that we can go back to and you know it kind of firmed up what we were doing. We were assessing a little bit, we had some thoughts about assessment. You know what, we need to be a player in this, we need to be there and there is no reason

why we can't be. Let's read the book, let's get integrated. So I think it has been a springboard for us.

Summary

Learning Reconsidered was introduced at High Plains University on two separate occasions. Upon its initial introduction, it was perceived as a personal project of an unpopular senior leader and made relatively little headway. The second introduction occurred as the institution geared up for its upcoming accreditation and in the midst of the student affairs division taking-stock of its collective values, mission, and goals. Consequently, the document's recommendations to promote holistic student development through collaboration with academic affairs and an increased focus on learning outcomes and their assessment dovetailed with emergent goals of the division. In short, *Learning Reconsidered* was widely viewed as making good sense to the majority of student affairs professionals at HPU at the time of its adoption.

Following the inclusive adoption of *Learning Reconsidered* by senior and mid-level professionals at a retreat, a small group of professionals convened to work on developing outcomes for the full division. Simultaneously, a number of departments moved forward putting various recommendations into practice. Throughout the effort, senior leaders provided the time and space for staff to engage in the implementation process while also promoting a culture of responsible risk-taking that encouraged creativity within individual units. As implementation proceeded, little focus was placed on implementing *Learning Reconsidered* itself, but rather on using the document as a tool to improve practice throughout the organization. On the one hand, the lack of focus on implementing specific recommendations led some to believe little attention was given to

putting the document into practice. On the other hand, by focusing on the core recommendations rather than the document itself, professionals in the division were able to adapt the document to improve practice in ways that made sense for their unit.

As the process unfolded, implementation remained a priority for the Vice President and was consistently discussed within staff meetings and during retreats. Furthermore, communication was promoted across the division to allow staff to share what was challenging their efforts and encourage them to provide recommendations for allocating resources to support the process. Finally, several outstanding mid-level professionals guided department-level efforts by providing thoughtful leadership while refraining from doing the work themselves. The result was that a number of entry-level professionals in many early adopting departments, Residence Life in particular, led implementation in the division.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion and Implications

In this concluding chapter I provide an analysis across the three cases of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*, discuss findings that emerged from cross-case analysis, connect the findings to the current scholarship on organizational change and implementation, integrate recommendations for practice and future research throughout and conclude with an overarching metaphor that captures the implementation process. Although my research questions guided data collection and analysis, they did not limit my gaze or the findings. As a result, I discuss findings that relate directly to the research questions but also include additional interesting findings that emerged across the cases. The following research questions were introduced at the outset of the study:

1. What was the implementation process employed by institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*?
2. At institutions that adopted *Learning Reconsidered*, what factors influenced the implementation of the recommended policies and practices?
3. What were the roles and responsibilities of actors within and beyond the division of student affairs in the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*?
4. What organizational levers, if any, were employed to influence implementation?

Because backward mapping was the analytic technique used in this study, it was essential to incorporate into the analysis a ground-view perspective that captured how implementation unfolded across the three student affairs divisions (Elmore, 1980; 1982). This was achieved by analyzing the interconnected components of the implementation

effort from the perspective of individuals with diverse vantage points and at various levels of each division. The use of backward mapping as an analytic technique disavows the inappropriate assumption often made by scholars who use forward mapping that leaders, formal or informal, can control implementation. Instead, backward mapping operates under the assumption that leaders must view their role as selective interveners in a “dispersed and decentralized process” (Elmore, 1980, p. 605).

Although *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced at or near the top of each student affairs division in this study, it is only one of many conceivable ways in which an innovative idea might be introduced (ACPA et al., 2006). In the next section I discuss a number of findings that surfaced across the divisions at Eastern State University, Pioneer State University, and High Plains University.

Findings and Implications

Three broad, overarching findings relating to implementation emerged across the three divisions of student affairs examined in this study. These included: 1) the influence of the initiation phase and adoption decision on implementation; 2) the multiple, cascading levels of adoption and implementation, and the roles of senior student affairs officers and mid-level professionals; and, 3) the importance of technical and leadership capacity and how resources were employed to bolster professional’s capacity to implement. Following each finding, I discuss implications that stem from it for research and practice.

Adoption Begets Implementation

One of the overarching findings of the study was the interconnectedness of the various components of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*. Although I

intended to focus my attention primarily on the implementation phase (Rogers, 1983), it was quickly apparent that the adoption decision and the initiation process that preceded it had significant impact on how implementation unfolded in each of the three cases. To illustrate the influence of the initiation phase and adoption decision on implementation I will contrast the processes against one another.

Learning Reconsidered was introduced at Eastern State University during the NASPA Institute, a large-scale professional development program brought to campus by Vice President Charlotte Pippen. Near the end of the five-day event, one of the presenters essentially spurred the document's adoption at ESU when she recommended that each department develop two learning outcomes and a plan to assess them for the upcoming academic year. Pippen simply concurred with this expectation and asked each department to move forward putting *Learning Reconsidered* into practice.

Although Pippen shared that she intended to use the NASPA Institute to articulate the need for learning outcomes in relation to the broader history and trends in higher education, she did not position it in relation to the local context or how and why putting *Learning Reconsidered* into practice made good sense for student affairs professionals at ESU. If significant discussion ever occurred among the division leadership or the staff as a whole as to how or why *Learning Reconsidered* or learning outcomes had utility in the context of ESU, this went unstated during interviews with participants. In contrast, Pippen spent significant time articulating the document's utility for ESU with her colleagues on the President's Cabinet.

Pippen's inattention to laying the groundwork for the adoption decision or articulating the utility of *Learning Reconsidered* had ramifications throughout the

implementation process. The lack of initial planning or agenda setting was clearly frustrating for the Director of the Student Center who was otherwise supportive. For others like the Director of Judicial Affairs, the lack of time taken to examine how *Learning Reconsidered* supported his department's mission and goals led him to passively resist implementation as he waited for someone to clearly articulate the big picture of how and why it made sense to invest his limited time and energy into the effort. In short, Pippen appeared to assume that if implementing *Learning Reconsidered* made sense elsewhere, it must also make sense for the division of student affairs at ESU. For some it did; for many others, it did not.

The decision to adopt *Learning Reconsidered* at Pioneer State was largely fueled by anxiety resulting from the critical accreditation report calling for increased assessment of student learning. The initiation process that led to the adoption decision was reminiscent of the defensive response a hive of bees might have to being kicked. In this metaphor the hive is Pioneer State, the bees are the division of student affairs and the kick, the accreditation report. Although the degree of pandemonium was less than the metaphor conjures up, many staff felt considerable urgency to act quickly to contribute to the assessment of student learning. From the perspective of the Coordinator of Greek Life, *Learning Reconsidered* was released at just the right time for the student affairs division to adopt it as a solution to an emerging problem. Unlike at Eastern State University where deciding to adopt *Learning Reconsidered* was disconnected from any division-wide reflection, agenda setting, or planning, the impetus for adoption at PSU was an external call for increased assessment of student learning. After the problem was identified in the accreditation report, *Learning Reconsidered* was framed by the Dean of Students as a

solution, which led to its quick adoption. Many participants shared that once the accreditation site visit prompting the adoption decision occurred the push to implement quickly dissipated.

The initial introduction of *Learning Reconsidered* at High Plains University resembled that which unfolded at ESU in that the then Vice President of Student Affairs shared it with her staff without initiating a period of reflection or framing its utility in their specific context. Consequently, a number of individuals viewed *Learning Reconsidered* as part of an unpopular vice president's personal agenda and responded with little interest. In contrast, the second introduction occurred while division directors and associate directors collectively took stock of their mission, values, and goals. As the group reflected on where they wanted to go and how they might get there, Kacy Burton reintroduced *Learning Reconsidered* to her colleagues as a possible tool that might support their renewed focus on student learning. Introducing *Learning Reconsidered* in this manner allowed it to be reframed from a pet project to something that made sense. The end result was that the document was perceived as an innovative idea that could help the division and individual departments achieve their goals and meet rising accreditation expectations.

One result of the adoption decision at HPU flowing from a period of organizational reflection, unencumbered by the anxiety of a negative accreditation report, was that it was widely perceived as initiated by Burton but ultimately chosen by the group. The document was not generally viewed as something forced on staff or "ramrodded" by division leadership. Three factors influenced this outcome. First, following the previous vice president's departure, time was taken during a series of

retreats and meetings for staff to engage in reflection and agenda setting. This led to the staff developing a consensus of who they wanted to be, where they wanted to go, and how to get there. Second, when Burton reintroduced *Learning Reconsidered*, it was framed not as a panacea, but as a tool that might be used to help reach the goals they collectively set. Third, the ultimate decision to adopt *Learning Reconsidered* was not forced by the current vice president. Instead, the document was slowly incorporated into initiatives throughout the division that the directors and associate directors already valued and were committed to achieving. While the Assistant to the Vice President perceived the implementation effort as relatively unintentional, it led to an apparent greater degree of commitment among the individual departments. Although slower than Burton desired, implementation was quite likely more deeply rooted than the effort at ESU or PSU because adoption happened with the staff, not to them.

In sum, how *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced and adopted in each division varied significantly and had considerable impact on implementation. For example, the lack of attention to laying the groundwork or collectively examining the document's utility at Eastern State University led to adoption being widely perceived as something forced upon professionals in the division. For the Student Success Center staff who viewed *Learning Reconsidered* as a good fit because of their comfort with learning outcomes and assessment, adoption made sense and implementation was "relatively easy." However, in departments where the recommendations less obviously fit, the implementation effort was hampered by the lack of attention to framing the utility of *Learning Reconsidered* in the local context.

In contrast, the decision to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice at Pioneer State and High Plains was viewed by the majority of staff as a collective and inclusive process, even though it was initially introduced and championed by a senior leader in each division. One result of the comparatively inclusive adoption decision at PSU and HPU was that more upper- and mid-level professionals at those institutions felt greater ownership and commitment to putting the recommendations embedded in *Learning Reconsidered* into practice than was the case at ESU. This finding resonates with multiple scholars who articulated the importance of inclusivity and collaboration during change initiatives (Collins, 2001; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Kuh, 1994; Reisser & Roper, 1999; Ward & Warner, 1996). Incorporating an inclusive planning process that focused on exploring the utility of *Learning Reconsidered* early in the effort was particularly important for organizations, departments, and individuals for whom the document's recommendations were out of the norm.

Implications for practice and research stem from these findings. For professionals charged with implementing change, the common advice shared by scholars is to begin by generating enthusiasm for the initiative (Kezar, 2003; Kuh, 1994). Enthusiasm among the staff in this study appeared to be important, but how it was generated might have been even more so. The data indicate that implementation was more likely to be successful when it emerged from a period of collective organizational reflection about mission, purpose and goals and how they might be achieved. Collins (2001, 2005) referred to this as facing the brutal facts whereas others label it organizational learning (Ausiello & Wells, 1997; Senge, 2000; Wheatley, 1999). Data across the three cases support the argument Collins (2005) asserted that educational organizations frequently avoid difficult

and frank conversations. The result of avoidance is an inability to take-stock of the organization and its environment or move forward with collective purpose. Therefore, leaders interested in focusing the attention of their staff on implementation should role model reflective practice while creating opportunities for the organization to collectively consider its purpose and how to enact it in the future. Beginning there, rather than with the introduction of a new best practice or innovative idea, is likely to enhance the degree of commitment to implementation throughout the organization in the long term.

To promote organizational reflection, purpose setting and implementation, change leaders in student affairs can borrow from Sanford's (1967) advice to educators on how to encourage student development. This begins by leaders conceptualizing their organization as a developmental being. They then must focus on supplying the appropriate balance of challenge and support while being cognizant of organizational readiness to adopt and implement an innovative idea. Heifetz (1994) provided one possible road map for change agents when he encouraged leaders to get on the balcony to observe what was unfolding and how they might rise above to see the bigger picture of implementation while remaining engaged in the ongoing effort.

There are also implications for research that result from these findings. First, because *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced at or near the top of the hierarchy within each of these student affairs divisions, it remains to be seen how implementation would have differed had it been introduced at other levels of the organization. Therefore, research examining how the implementation of innovative ideas that emerge from various locations in student affairs divisions is needed. Second, because I examined three organizations relatively early on in their efforts to put *Learning Reconsidered* into

practice, I am left to merely speculate about the long-term impact of the implementation effort on policy and practice in each university. Studies of organizations further along in their efforts is recommended in order to understand the longer-term influence of how the adoption decision was made on implementation. A third area of scholarship needed is an examination of the influence of institutional accreditation on policy and practice in divisions of student affairs. In each case, accreditation was noted as being connected to some degree to the push to implement but the extent of its influence at ESU and HPU beyond an awareness of the senior leadership was uncertain.

Cascading Adoption and Implementation and Shifting Roles

Another finding that surfaced across each of the cases was that the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* occurred in a generally decentralized manner following its centralized introduction. At Eastern State, for example, although the process had a common starting point with the NASPA Institute, implementation in the division was limited to the development of department-level learning outcomes. Likewise, at Pioneer State, the adoption of *Learning Reconsidered* by the vice president's council led to the three Assistant and Associate Vice Presidents being charged with cluster-level implementation with little to no focus on a division-wide effort. Additionally, once *Learning Reconsidered* reached the clusters, it was quickly farmed out to directors to implement within individual departments. Even at High Plains University, which focused initially on developing division-wide learning outcomes, the majority of time and attention was directed toward putting *Learning Reconsidered* into practice within individual departments. The cascading implementation process – from division, to cluster, to department - makes sense given that divisions of student affairs are often

loosely-coupled (Kuh, 2003; Weick, 1976), operate as professional bureaucracies (Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007; Mintzberg, 1979), and consequently units frequently operate in a decentralized manner with significant autonomy.

One result of the cascading implementation process was that adoption and implementation did not occur once, but repeatedly as they spread out through the organization. Consequently, there was not a single, common implementation process that unfolded within any of the three institutions. Instead, myriad processes simultaneously occurred that were rooted in the broader institutional and divisional culture, and influenced by the local culture and context in each individual department. A result of the manner in which adoption and implementation occurred was that the roles and responsibilities of actors shifted as the process unfolded. In short, although *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced and initially adopted at the top of the organization, the work of putting it into practice was delegated from senior staff to mid-level professionals and frequently was charged to entry-level staff. I next describe the shifting roles of the senior student affairs officers during implementation and then discuss the central role of mid-level professionals as the process unfolded.

As previously noted, the primary champion of the implementation effort in each case was at or near the top of each division. From the outset of the process, Pippen at Eastern State, Svenson at Pioneer State, and Burton at High Plains were highly influential in the introduction and subsequent adoption of *Learning Reconsidered*. Leading up to adoption and throughout implementation, professionals looked to the champion and the senior student affairs officer for the degree of support the initiative was going to receive. Initial cues were taken from the vice president's level of commitment as indicated by the

persistence and intensity of their rhetoric, the ongoing presence of their formal and informal communication, and the amount of resources they marshaled to support implementation.

When formal and informal conversations were ongoing, as was the case division-wide at PSU and HPU, staff shared that they quickly realized the issue was not going away. This recognition led mid-level staff to focus time and attention on putting *Learning Reconsidered* into practice within their departments. In contrast, at ESU, even though significant resources were devoted to kick start implementation, the lack of ongoing conversations in staff meetings or clear communication from Vice President Pippen led to persistent uncertainty among busy professionals as to the amount of time and attention they should devote to the effort. Furthermore, when Pippen adjusted the annual reports and individual evaluations to fuel implementation, the result was increased frustration and fear among the staff that the rules and expectations had changed but that they found out only after the fact. The implication for change leaders is that consistency and persistence of formal and informal communication related to implementation is a key lever in keeping the attention of the staff. Although ongoing conversations during staff meetings are not enough, their absence may be perceived as a sign that implementation is not a high priority. Indeed, it might be the informal, ongoing conversations that matter more than grand, public proclamations.

Scholars in post-secondary organizations consistently cite senior administrative support as the most important factor during change and implementation efforts (Collins, 2005; Furst-Bowe & Bauer, 2007; Kezar, 2003) and the data across the cases partly supported that assertion. For example, the Health Center Director shared that

implementing *Learning Reconsidered* simply would not have even been attempted at ESU without Pippen taking the lead. The Director believed that change could only occur from the top-down in the division because of the culture of the organization. On the other hand, it was also apparent that senior administrative support was simply not enough and in some situations, such as the initial effort at HPU, may have been detrimental.

Following the initial introduction and adoption of *Learning Reconsidered*, as implementation efforts were delegated to clusters or departments, the role of the senior student affairs officer became increasingly symbolic and behind-the-scenes. Successful strategies incorporated by the senior student affairs officers to move their divisions forward included ongoing communication of the vision and the utility of *Learning Reconsidered* in achieving it, listening to the needs of staff and responding by marshaling appropriate resources, publicly and privately celebrating successes, allowing directors ample autonomy to implement, and serving as coach and mentor to mid-level professionals as they led efforts at the department level. Vice President Van Galder at Pioneer State recognized clearly that when implementation lagged in areas of the organization, it was a responsibility he shared with his senior staff to provide one-on-one coaching to the director of that unit. At High Plains, where trust was already established and competition was being deemphasized, mentoring often occurred during staff meetings and retreats and less often, one-on-one. The implications are that coaching and mentoring should be rooted in the culture of the organization and then strive to sufficiently meet the needs of individual staff. Consequently, change leaders should focus attention prior to and throughout implementation on knowing their staff in order to respond effectively to their needs throughout the process, as Sandeen (2001) advises.

As the process moved from division-wide adoption to department-level implementation, mid-level professionals took on increasingly prominent leadership roles. Because of the cascading nature of implementation, the challenges that accompanied centralized adoption emerged time and again within each department. Consequently, as the process unfolded in each unit, many mid-level professionals were called on to frame the utility of *Learning Reconsidered* in their local context and then moving to put it into practice. Examples of mid-level professionals' influence on department-level implementation included the early adopting Registrar and Ted Dewey at HPU, the Directors of the Union and Multicultural Center at PSU, and the Directors of the Student Success Center and Recreation Center at ESU. When mid-level professionals were committed to the endeavor, possessed sufficient technical competence related to the innovation, had the time and space to operate effectively, and were capable of leading department-level implementation, they were more likely to be successful in their efforts. The importance of the preparation of mid-level professionals to lead implementation will be examined in the next section.

The finding that mid-level professionals were highly influential in the process supports those who found that the presence of leaders and champions throughout the organization increased the likelihood of successful implementation (Bringle & Hatch, 1996; Creamer & Creamer, 1986; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Smith & Rogers, 2005; Ward & Warner, 1996). However, whereas many scholars noted that mid-level professionals are important supporters of the process; my study suggests that department-level directors were at the center of implementation – not on the periphery. This aligns with Katzenbach (1996) who coined the term “real change leaders” (p. 149) to describe middle and front-

line managers in the business sector whom he believed were essential in connecting the vision of senior management to the realities of the market and workplace.

There are a number of additional implications for practice that stem from these findings. First, the significant role of mid-level professionals during implementation amplifies the importance of the earlier finding that the commitment of student affairs professionals was enhanced when the adoption decision happened with them, rather than to them. Additionally, it sharpens the previous recommendation for change leaders to focus early on ensuring an inclusive initiation phase and adoption decision by including mid-level professionals from the outset whenever possible. When student affairs divisions operate as professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1979), mid-level professionals have significant autonomy in how they lead departments, and without a high degree of commitment to initiatives on their part, it is unlikely implementation will be successful. Change leaders simply must attend early to ensuring the commitment of mid-level professionals.

How change leaders promoted commitment among mid-level professionals beyond involvement in the adoption decision also suggests implications for moving implementation forward. The data indicated that directors are more likely to champion and guide the effort in their department when change leaders involve them in the initial adoption decision, communicate persistent messages that implementation is a priority, provide appropriate support and resources when needed, make available the time and space to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice, and ensure quality coaching on how to lead the implementation process. Because of the high variation in cultures across and within student affairs divisions, using this list as a blueprint or checklist would be

inappropriate. Instead, change leaders should think about how to apply these findings in the unique context of their organization's culture and significant subcultures. Phrasing these findings as questions may be most appropriate. For example, change leaders can ask: Does my staff have the resources they need to be successful? How do I know? If I am not sure, how can I find out?

Because implementation unfolds in multiple departments with different cultures, change leaders and mid-level professionals charged with leading department-level efforts must have a deft understanding of the context in which they are operating. Taking time as a team early on to engage in a cultural audit might provide a more complete understanding of the multiple contexts in which implementation will occur. Understanding the multiple subcultures and developing an appreciation for the impact of context on implementation might also lower frustration that often arises between directors when they observe one another moving at different paces or in different directions with their efforts.

Additionally, because of the likely presence of multiple cultures existing in their division, senior student affairs officers must be comfortable providing mid-level professionals significant freedom to implement innovative ideas in ways that make sense for their departments. The focus of the senior student affairs officer should be on developing a common vision and outcomes that have utility across departments and providing ample autonomy to director-level staff. Therefore, the mindset of change leaders should not be focused on implementing a specific innovative idea, but on improving practice within the division using innovative ideas to achieve this goal.

Organizational Capacity Matters

A third overarching finding that emerged across the three cases was the importance of each organization's technical and leadership capacity to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Although the process each division employed to bolster capacity varied, all focused the majority of their attention on developing technical rather than leadership skills among their staff. In this section I examine the influence of the preparation of staff to implement *Learning Reconsidered*, discuss how the technical and leadership capacities of professionals were or were not developed, review how resources were used to fuel the effort, and discuss implications for research and practice.

Technical capacity. During conversations across the three divisions I rarely sensed that anyone intentionally impeded implementation. This finding complicates the perspective of scholars who believed that change efforts in student affairs were often stymied by active opposition (Creamer, Creamer, & Ford, 1991). Instead, I believe the majority of staff operated with good intentions to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Consequently, I concur with the perspective of the education faculty member at Pioneer State who believed that nearly everyone at PSU was doing the very best they knew how to do. However, what constituted professionals' very best differed significantly within and between institutions. For example, the best effort of the Director of the Multicultural Center at PSU was to enhance an already well-regarded retention initiative into a program touted as a best practice by national organizations. Conversely, the best effort of the Admissions Director at High Plains was spending time thinking about how his department might support student learning but making little head-way.

One explanation for the variation in professionals' ability to implement was identified by the Director of the Multicultural Center at PSU. He shared that his doctoral education provided the foundational knowledge and skill-set he needed to move forward. Examples of professionals with the required technical capacity to implement as a result of previous educational or professional experiences existed in each division. Frequently it was these technically advanced professionals, such as the directors of the Student Success Center at ESU and TRIO Programs at HPU, who led the early adopting and implementing units.

Even though technically adept professionals existed across the cases, data indicated significant variation between each division's organization-wide preparation and capacity to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. For example, at High Plains the professional staff was on-average highly educated, aware of current trends, previously involved in strategic planning, maintained a commitment to collaborating with colleagues in academic affairs, and possessed a moderate comfort level with student assessment. In other words, a sizable number of the professional staff possessed a value for and the technical capacity to implement the document's recommendations. In contrast, the majority of professionals at ESU rarely collaborated, viewed themselves as service rather than learning oriented, and generally lacked the ability to write or assess learning outcomes. When comparing staff preparedness to implement across the two divisions, the variation in technical capacity is apparent. In sum, at the point of adoption, the average student affairs professional at ESU had a lot more learning to do than did their counterpart at HPU before they would be capable of implementing *Learning Reconsidered*.

Regardless of the baseline technical capacity of each organization, change leaders across the cases worked to bolster the knowledge and skill of their staff. At ESU, Vice President Phippen allocated twenty-thousand dollars to bring experts from the NASPA national office to provide foundational knowledge on *Learning Reconsidered* and guidance on the writing of learning outcomes. She followed this up by contracting with the Keeling Group to conduct program reviews and create department-level strategic plans. While on campus the consultants also conducted workshops to provide one-on-one coaching for senior and mid-level professionals charged with learning outcome development.

At Pioneer State, Dean Svenson and Vice President Van Galder focused attention on ramping up professionals' ability to use the recommendations to enhance existing programs and advance their assessment of co curricular student learning. To achieve these goals, Svenson and Van Galder funded staff attendance at national and regional conferences, developed a Dean's Seminar that frequently focused on assessment, contracted a faculty member to support department-level implementation, and encouraged staff to reach out to on campus experts in the Office of the Provost to work one-on-one to develop assessment plans.

Change leaders at HPU used similar tactics to Pioneer State such as funding staff to attend assessment conferences, seeking support from faculty at the institution to develop learning outcomes, and charging the existing Assessment Committee to provide one-on-one technical consulting to support assessment initiatives. They also applied two additional strategies. First, the small group of self-selected directors charged with supporting implementation surveyed the staff to determine what resources were needed to

put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. The data were then used to guide decision-making concerning what resources were provided and how and when they were employed. Second, the relational nature of campus led to informal conversations between change leaders and mid- and entry-level staff as the process unfolded. For example, Burton met monthly with the residence life coordinators and encouraged them to share their frustrations and needs. When the coordinators shared with her that they lacked the time and expertise to adequately assess student learning in the residence halls, Burton responded by contracting with Student Voice, a consulting company specializing in co-curricular learning assessment, to augment their efforts.

In comparing the three strategies used to bolster the technical capacity of each organization, it is interesting to note that what was done across the cases was relatively similar. For instance, change leaders in each division purchased the document for staff to read, provided or supported professional development opportunities within and beyond campus, and contracted with consultants to work one-on-one with departments. On the other hand, significant variation across divisions existed in how and when resources were deployed. At ESU, Pippen worked relatively autonomously to plan the NASPA Institute and then brought in external consultants to review selected programs. The results of each were mixed. Although the institute was exciting for some staff, the amount of new information presented and its timing just prior to the beginning of the spring semester resulted in many professionals feeling overwhelmed. Furthermore, infrequent communication between Pippen and mid- and entry-level professionals about what they needed to implement led to increased frustration with the Vice President and a loss of agency related to implementation among professionals.

In contrast, Van Galder and Svenson at PSU placed a greater focus on individualized interventions such as the use of an education faculty member and the Associate Provost to consult with staff to support department-level efforts. The Associate Provost believed three factors enhanced her ability to support implementation: 1) she has a previous relationship with the directors rooted in trust and respect; 2) directors viewed her as a useful tool, but not the hammer setting the expectation for implementation; and 3) staff came to her of their own volition and most frequently in the midst of implementation when technical challenges emerged that they needed help to overcome. Similar to PSU, change leaders at High Plains provided resources throughout the process to promote technical competence, but also spent ample time reaching out to mid- and entry-level professionals to ascertain their needs. One result of open communication was a growing perception among mid- and entry-level professionals that their perspectives were valued and the leadership was responsive to their suggestions.

A number of implications stem from these findings. First, change leaders should carefully consider the pacing and timing of resource allocation in relation to the level of staff preparedness to implement. It is conceivable that because the staff at Eastern State was so ill-prepared to implement *Learning Reconsidered* that any initial effort to develop their technical capacity would have felt overwhelming. On the other hand, it is likely that building in a few incremental steps to scaffold their knowledge and skills as the process unfolded would have caused less stress than front-loading training and staff development. The data indicate that if professionals are not ready for the information and training they receive, its intended impact is minimized. This implication reinforces the advice of Diamond (2002), Eckel and Kezar (2003), and Keller (2004) who advised change leaders

to leverage organization resources with care to prepare their staff for organizational change efforts.

Second, time must be taken early in the effort to develop organizationally appropriate communication systems that allow change leaders and mid- and entry-level professionals to share information in either direction. Although communication is frequently mentioned as a key strategy when leading change efforts (e.g., Hunter, 2006; Kuh, 1994; Ward & Warner, 1996), unidirectional communication is not enough. Consequently, leaders are encouraged to develop communication systems that encourage – not merely allow - the multidirectional exchange of ideas throughout the organization. When open communication is infrequent, mid- and entry-level professionals are likely to lose their sense of agency related to implementation due to their inability to communicate emergent challenges or articulate the resources or training they need to overcome them. Likewise, without mid- and entry-level professionals' insight into implementation, change leaders will continue to be ill-equipped to make wise decisions about how and when to marshal the necessary resources to support the effort.

Third, once foundational knowledge and skills are developed and a workable communication system is established, change leaders are encouraged to incorporate a just-in-time resource allocation strategy. This recommendation stems from the finding that resources were most effective in enhancing technical capacity when they were deployed in response to emergent problems. Additionally, interventions were particularly successful when tailored to the needs of individual departments, delivered one-on-one or in small groups, and performed by trusted individuals nested within the institution that

understood the organizational context. Change leaders would be wise to consider how they might incorporate such tactics into their own just-in-time interventions.

Fourth, professionals benefit from being granted permission to try new things and take reasonable risks during implementation. Encouraging a culture of reasonable risk-taking was specifically noted by Burton and Van Galder as being central to their ability to implement *Learning Reconsidered* and is consistent with a number of scholar's recommendations (Heifitz, 1994; Kezar, 2001; Ward & Warner, 1996). Such a tone is important because when innovative ideas are initially put into practice, the likelihood of success right out of the gate is quite small (ACPA & NASPA, 2004). Consequently, if the professional staff is hesitant to try new things until they feel adequately prepared, the organization will likely be waiting a long time to begin implementing. Instead, change leaders should frame early implementation efforts as a first and best attempt, that mistakes will be made, things will be learned, and that mid- and entry-level professionals should do their best with the capacity they possess, communicate challenges as they emerge, and request the resources they need to overcome difficulties as they arise. For many mid- and entry-level student affairs professionals, taking on the role of active problem solver may initially stretch their abilities. Consequently, staff training and ongoing professional development is essential. Focusing efforts on problem-based learning such as table-top exercises in which current issues are examined and dissected in a learning-focused environment can model the desired mindset and over time develop professionals' technical capacity to implement.

Leadership capacity. Unlike the significant attention change leaders across the cases devoted to ramping up the technical capacity of professionals to implement, less

time was committed to developing leadership capacity in each organization. This finding was surprising because of the number of times champions and senior student affairs officers commented on the importance of leadership in the process. In this section I compare how each organization bolstered its leadership capacity and discuss implications that stem from the findings.

At Eastern State, Pippen was blunt in her assessment of the inability of the staff she inherited to lead implementation efforts. Her response was to adjust the titles of directors she believed were capable of moving the division forward and then hire two external candidates to fill the associate vice president positions. At Pioneer, Van Galder commented that his management philosophy was to hire outstanding professionals into senior positions and then provide them ample autonomy to lead their units. He had great confidence in his current senior leadership team and believed it was their good work that fueled the implementation effort. Perhaps it was because of his already high level of confidence in his senior staff that minimal concerted effort was made to further develop the organization's leadership capacity among mid- and entry-level professionals to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice.

At High Plains modest attention was paid to developing the leadership ability of professional staff. One example was the work of Ted Dewey in Residence Life. Dewey shared in detail his efforts to build upon the residence life coordinators' collective ability to generate a vision, assess the needs of their staff, and develop strategies to build momentum. Dewey focused the majority of his attention on sharing resources and leading conversations to deepen the coordinators' thinking about the change process and their role within it. Additionally, although not intended to bolster leadership capacity, the

process of developing division-wide learning outcomes at HPU provided a venue for directors to practice how to introduce and implement *Learning Reconsidered* in their own departments.

Looking within and across the cases, is it noteworthy that although early unit-level implementation was often related to innovation/unit fit, it was also apparent that when highly capable directors led the effort, implementation was more likely. Two examples of outstanding leaders in mid-level leadership roles were Ted Dewey at HPU and the recreation center director at ESU. Each recognized from the outset that if implementation was going to lead to transformative change – a goal of *Learning Reconsidered* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004) – each needed to give much of the work back to their staff. They did so by creating the time and space for entry-level professionals in their unit to participate fully in the implementation process. Dewey's goal was to facilitate a setting in which the coordinators took ownership of implementation. Similarly, entry-level staff in the Recreation Center initially viewed implementation as an initiative to check off an already long list of projects. Recognizing this emerging mindset, the director slowed the process and encouraged them to begin to reassess what implementation might mean to the totality of their efforts in the department, if done in a manner consistent with the document's recommendations. In both cases, the entry-level professionals in each department shared that their strong commitment to move forward resulted from the leadership of the directors.

Although neither of these mid-level professionals mentioned using a particular model or framework, the description of how they led the process within their unit made it apparent that each operated with a keen understanding of organizational change. It was

because these two professionals were committed to the effort, possessed significant leadership experience, and understood how organizational change occurs that they refrained from just doing the work themselves. This stands in stark contrast to other mid-level professionals across the cases that moved quickly and achieved a fair amount in their implementation efforts but did so without including their staff in the process. In these latter situations, such as in the Union at Pioneer State, it remains to be seen whether removing the director – the primary driving force in that unit – will significantly impact the momentum or outcome of the initiative.

A number of implications emanate from these findings. First, champions and senior student affairs officers must balance their desire to implement rapidly with the reality that transformational change in higher education is rarely quick to occur (Eckel & Kezar, 2002). Therefore, when transformation is desired and in light of the central role of mid-level professionals in the process, it behooves senior student affairs officers to focus increased attention on bolstering the leadership capacity of directors throughout their organization. There are many ways to do this such as encouraging staff to pursue professional development experiences, developing coaching and mentoring experiences, encouraging further educational pursuits, and when appropriate, hiring staff to build capacity. Staff meetings should not be overlooked as opportunities to increase leadership capacity in the organization. Rather than meetings being used only to convey information, a better use might be to incorporate ongoing reflection and critical discussions about mission, values, goals and strategic planning that can enhance the organization's ability to learn (Senge, 1990). Deciding which tactics to use should be

done in conjunction with the immediacy of the challenges, the pressure to implement, availability of resources, needs of the staff, and the culture of the organization.

Second, although professional associations sponsor a number of programs to further the development of mid-level professionals, relatively few opportunities exist in relation to the size of the profession. Simply stated, more needs to be done profession-wide to increase the leadership capacity of mid-level professionals.

Third, the data in this study repeatedly called attention to the significant influence of mid-level professionals during implementation. Yet, little is known about who these mid-level professionals are, how they are educated and trained, what competencies they need to be successful in their roles, or what professional development experiences might support their ability to be successful in their positions generally or their ability to lead implementation efforts specifically. Each of these areas is ripe for research.

Capturing Implementation in Metaphor

In this section I introduce a metaphor that captures the complex and non-linear nature of implementation across the three cases. The metaphor ties together a number of the findings discussed in the previous section. Using the metaphor of a river delta to capture the implementation process is appropriate because of the finding that when divisions of student affairs put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice, the components of the process (e.g., introduction; adoption; implementation) were rarely distinct or entirely linear. Rather, they flowed from and into one another influencing how each transpired as the process unfolded. In sum, the metaphor serves as an overarching framework and includes many of the key findings that surfaced across the cases.

Implementation as River Delta

Peter Vaill described change in contemporary organizations as permanent whitewater (1995). The image he conjured up was the ever quickening pace of change and the need for those navigating the change process to respond as best they could while acknowledging their relative lack of control. On the one hand, the idea of a raging river and a kayaker navigating myriad obstacles does indeed capture the challenges many of the change leaders in this study articulated experiencing at some points during implementation. Dr. Charlotte Pippen, the Vice President at Eastern State University, exemplified the conceptualization of Vaill's permanent whitewater metaphor when she shared that she felt like "a lone wolf" in the wilderness during much of her first year as she tried to put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice. Her feelings of loneliness, by her own admission, led to her desire to hire "mini-mes" to help her implement *Learning Reconsidered* in the "virtual wasteland" of ESU.

On the other hand, when Vaill's (1995) metaphor is applied to the cases of this study it insinuates that each student affairs division and the professionals within it were obstacles that needed to be navigated by change leaders rather than partners in the process of putting a new idea into practice. Elmore (1980) commented that the use of forward mapping in implementation studies often resulted in scholars and change leaders viewing the organization in this way.

When analyzing implementation only from the perspective of a change agent, it is easy to perceive the process as permanent whitewater (Vaill, 1995). However, when implementation is examined from the vantage points of a wide range of student affairs professionals across the division, the process resembles less a scenario in which a

champion or senior student affairs officer is battling resistant components of his or her environment and more a complex interaction between new and existing ideas and ways of operating. For example, Ted Dewey, the Director of Residence Life at High Plains University, viewed his live-in staff as an indispensable instrument in implementing *Learning Reconsidered*. Consequently, Dewey refrained from prescribing the outcomes of their effort and instead provided staff the time and space they needed to make sense of the new ideas in relation to their work, implement the recommendations, and then redesign various components of the residence life program to align with and support implementation. In short, Dewey focused the live-in staff's attention, coached them, marshaled resources, and encouraged them to use their education, training, knowledge of the organization, and creativity to implement *Learning Reconsidered*. He viewed his staff as partners, not obstacles, and himself as a guide through the process of putting a new idea into practice. This conceptualization of implementation is congruent with the process that occurred across the three divisions in which multiple individuals simultaneously served as guides as *Learning Reconsidered* was introduced, adopted, and implemented. Even at ESU, where Pippen often perceived her staff as an obstacle, many others such as the Directors of the Recreation Center and Student Success Center viewed the colleagues in their units as the primary mechanism to be employed to put the ideas into practice and that it was their responsibility to lead the effort.

As a result, I conclude that the metaphor of a single, fast-paced river being navigated by change leaders forwarded by Vaill (1995) is only partially useful in capturing the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* in these three divisions. Yes, there were multiple challenges and numerous obstacles to implementation that were

detailed in each of the cases, but implementation was much more complicated than a single leader taking charge, bringing an idea to campus, and shepherding the idea through the organization until it was successfully implemented. Rather, the image that I find best captures how implementation occurred across the three divisions is that of a large river as it flows from a single stream to a complex and slower paced delta before it spills into a large body of water. In this metaphor, the river's water and current symbolize the continuous flow of new ideas that mix with existing ideas in the delta area and other new ideas flowing from various tributaries. The delta is the student affairs division and its multiple, loosely-coupled departments (Weick, 1976). The water's pathway through the delta is the implementation process as the innovative idea, in this case *Learning Reconsidered*, cascades its way through the organization along multiple, interconnected routes.

As ideas move further from the push of the central current, they spread out and interact with myriad existing ideas and ways of operating. This results in the adaptation of the ideas and the alteration of the organization itself. Similar to the metaphor where water flows through the delta along various routes and is constantly changing its flow in response to shifts in the sediment, river bottom, rocks and root structures, divisions of student affairs include numerous individuals situated throughout the organization that influence the implementation of new ideas. During the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered*, the individuals who were most likely to guide the idea through the student affairs divisions were those in mid-level positions such as department-level directors or those responsible for the leadership of a cluster of departments. The importance of having adequately prepared guides is essential in supporting the implementation effort.

Another overarching finding that emerged across the three cases captured by the river delta metaphor was the non-discrete and interconnected nature of the implementation process as it unfolded over time and throughout each organization. In each division, the various components of the implementation process of *Learning Reconsidered* influenced one another vertically and horizontally from initial awareness, to adoption, to putting the embedded recommendations into practice. An example of horizontal influence was the early adoption and implementation efforts of the Registrar at High Plains University. The quick pace of this department's successful efforts resulted in other departments and the division as a whole believing that, if the Registrar could put *Learning Reconsidered* into practice, then they could as well. In addition to the horizontal interconnectedness, there was a similar vertical relationship in each organization. An example was the significant influence of how the adoption decision was made at Eastern State University on department-level implementation efforts. Taking the interconnected nature of the process into account and using this awareness to their advantage when making decisions is essential for change leaders.

An additional finding that emerged was the influence of organizational culture and context on implementation. Returning to the metaphor, the river delta is a highly interconnected ecosystem in which each component – river, environment, flora, and fauna – interacts with and affects the others in obvious and subtle ways. The complexity of the delta ecosystem makes understanding cause and effect when changes occur in the environment difficult to foresee. In addition, the context of each river delta is unique and is not static. Understanding how components of a delta interact and influence one another

at a given point in time does not predict their relationship over time, or transfer to understanding other deltas.

Similarly, as *Learning Reconsidered* was implemented in each of the three student affairs divisions, it became apparent that nearly everything affected the effort; it all mattered. It just all mattered differently in each organizational context and even at different times within a single context (i.e., the first and second implementation efforts at High Plains University). Influential factors included the history and culture of the division, the degree of education of the professional staff, the level of awareness of national trends and best practices within the division, accreditation, the use of various levers to focus staff attention on the effort, the technical and leadership capacity of the organization, the availability of timely professional development, and the leadership style of the senior student affairs officer. An example of how similar levers used in separate divisions resulted in different outcomes was the adaptation of annual reports to encourage implementation. At Pioneer State and High Plains, incorporating progress in implementing and assessing learning outcomes into each department's annual report was viewed as relatively non-threatening. However, a similar change at Eastern State University provoked significant anxiety and resentment toward the vice president from a number of staff members. Although each lever was meant to focus attention of the staff on implementation, how each was enacted and the organizational culture and context in which it was employed led to significant variations in the end result of its use.

The conclusion that I draw from an analysis across the three divisions is that there was no single lever that was universally effective. Instead, successful implementation was dependent upon leaders throughout the organization being aware of the culture and

context of the organization, the shifting needs of their staff members, and then responding appropriately to support and bolster their efforts. This finding is consistent with earlier research on change strategies by Sandeen (2001), Eckel and Kezar (2003), and Locke and Guglielmino (2006). But, rather than agreeing with Diamond (2002) who viewed culture as a barrier, I contend that culture should be used by change leaders as a road map to guide decision-making broadly, and how and when to use levers to further implementation, specifically.

Using the metaphor of a river delta to capture implementation builds upon Vaill's (1995) belief of the constancy of change and borrows from Wheatley's (1994) view that ideas are the "creative energy of the universe" that drives organizations and innovation forward. The broader ecosystem of the river delta that symbolizes the interconnectedness of the organizational context, multiple subcultures and their shifting influence on the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* is consistent calls for leaders to incorporate a systems perspective (Kuh, 1994; Scott, 2002; Morgan, 1999) and use multiple lenses when leading change efforts (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

The metaphor also challenges earlier research on the importance of administrators located at the pinnacle of the organization on implementation (Creamer & Creamer, 1986; Furst-Bowe & Bauer, 2007; Hunter, 2006; Keller, 2004; Kezar, 2005; Manning et al., 2006; Sandeen, 2001). Instead, I suggest that the influence of the senior student affairs officer or primary change agent is transferred in part after the initial introduction to mid-level professionals. These mid-level professionals take on increasingly influential roles as they guide implementation efforts in the loosely-coupled departments (Weick,

1976). The essential role of mid-level professionals during implementation builds upon the findings of Smith and Rogers (2005).

Applying the Metaphor to Practice

The river delta metaphor is not presented as a model to be followed by leaders hoping to implement innovations in their organizations. Rather, it is shared to capture the complexity and nature of the process by which innovative ideas are put into practice. Conceptualizing implementation as a river delta falls short of providing a step-by-step manual of how to enact an innovation; its utility is in the framework it provides and the mindset it encourages. Applying the river delta metaphor to their own organization can help change leaders and others make sense of the process, understand their shifting role as implementation unfolds, recognize the importance of senior leaders, mid-level professionals and others, and employ levers in ways and at times that move the effort forward. Ideally, incorporating the metaphor will encourage patience and persistence among change agents and champions by helping them understand why change is often slow to spread and the importance of sustaining the effort over time as noted by Collins (2001, 2005).

One of the resounding implications from the study is the importance of possessing an appropriate mindset when implementing an innovation. Consequently, I provide the three proceeding recommendations. First, I implore change leaders to recognize their limitations and the opportunities they have to influence the process. Doing so allows them to focus attention on key points in the process such as the initiation phase and adoption decision (Rogers, 1983) where their influence is significant. Additionally, as the process moves beyond centralized adoption and into decentralized implementation, senior

leaders and champions must recognize and embrace their symbolic and behind-the-scenes role. Although they may be called upon to encourage risk-taking, communicate consistently, listen carefully, respond appropriately, marshal resources when necessary, coach and mentor, celebrate successes, and continuously frame the utility of the innovation, it is how and when they act that is of utmost importance. In short, their behaviors must be congruent with the environment in which they operate. As such, I agree with Fullan (2001) that employing a checklist is to be avoided and add that leaders who use the river delta metaphor to make sense of the complexity are better equipped to respond appropriately.

Second, change leaders should refrain from conceptualizing successful implementation as putting a specific idea into practice in a certain way. Rarely do administrations have the necessary influence to ensure such an outcome (Cohen & March, 1986; Mintzberg, 1979; Elmore, 1980). Instead, innovative ideas should be viewed as tools to help the organization achieve its mission and goals. In most organizations, how the innovation is perceived will shift over time as the process cascades through the organization into departments with different cultures and priorities (Locke & Guglielmino, 2006). Change leaders need to provide mid-level professionals – the guides – with significant autonomy and adequate time and space to move forward in ways that makes sense in the context of their specific unit. Of all the resources and levers noted in the cases, availability of time and space emerged as the most significant in supporting implementation. Furthermore, enhancing the organizational leadership capacity by preparing mid-level professionals adequately for their role as guides increases the likelihood of implementation.

Third, leaders should strive to view themselves as part of, not apart from, their organization. When leaders believe they are doing battle against resistive colleagues rather than perceiving them as partners, it is quite difficult to lead a collaborative, inclusive, and team-based effort as called for by scholars (Bensimon & Neumann, 1994; Bringle & Hatch, 1996; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Reiser & Roper, 1999; Ward & Warner, 1996). Implementation is too hard, student affairs are organizations too loosely-coupled (Weick, 1976), and professionals operate with too much autonomy (Kuh, 2003; Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007) for a change leader to ensure implementation on their own. Embracing the metaphor leads individuals in the organization to understand their unique and essential role in the process. Leaders and champions must recognize that implementation is most effective when it happens with, not to professionals. The mantra of Vice President Van Galder at Pioneer State University is worth noting, "People don't resist change; they resist being changed." The key point is that how leaders view the role of their staff in the effort – as guide or impediment - will likely determine their approach throughout the process.

Summary of Theoretical Implications

As previously noted, a number of theoretical implications emerged from this study. In this section I briefly summarize a few of the key ideas. First, the introduction of the river delta metaphor to describe the implementation process is a new way of conceptualizing how innovations are put into practice in postsecondary organizations. The metaphor provides a flexible framework for making sense of the iterative, complex, and frequently non-linear nature of the process. The inclusion of the broader environment of the delta in the metaphor forwards the perspective that organizational context and

culture should be viewed as a roadmap, not a barrier. Second, because the river delta captures the repetitive process by which innovations are implemented as they cascade through organizations, it encourages a reevaluation of the role of senior leaders and mid-level professionals in the process. Although senior leaders remain important, their influence appears greater at the outset and increasingly transitioned to being more symbolic and behind the scenes as implementation proceeded. Simultaneous to the shifting roles of senior leaders was the growing influence of mid-level professionals as they guided implementation efforts within individual units.

Third, although leaders and champions used many of the same levers as they tried to propel implementation forward in their organization; it was how and when levers were employed that was particularly important. The implication is that although it is quite common in the leadership and organizational change literature for scholars to recommend a series of steps to be taken (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1996; Kuh, 1996), more time should be spent on exploring how and when to do so for maximum impact within the specific organizational contexts in which the implementation will occur. Furthermore, although many of the commonly noted levers and resources discussed in the literature were employed by change leaders across the cases, the key resource that emerged in this study was the availability of time and space for mid-level professionals to put innovative ideas into practice in their units.

Fourth, possibly because of the use of backward mapping as the analytical technique to provide a ground view perspective of the process, resistance to implementation among mid- and entry-level professionals did not emerge as a significant issue across the cases. The implication is that resistance may be in the eye of the beholder

and the use of different research methods may provide different perspectives on how and why individuals respond to implementation and change as they do. It seems likely that when implementation is examined primarily from the perspective of those leading the effort, the presence of slow and non-adopters can easily be viewed as being the result of resistant individuals. In this study, what was perceived as resistance by some change leaders was instead a very rational response by professionals to unclear expectations or a lack of capacity to implement. Resistance was therefore less an intentional response to impede implementation on the part of staff and more an outcome of the process happening to them rather than including them as partners in putting the new idea into practice.

Summary of Recommendations for Practice

Throughout this chapter, I provided recommendations for practice that emerged from the data. In this section, I briefly summarize these recommendations with the intent of providing areas of focus for those aspiring to implement innovative ideas. As previously noted, because of the unique culture and context of each organization, what is done by champions and leaders is likely to be less important than how and when various actions are taken. Consequently, change leaders are encouraged from the outset to focus ample time and attention on understanding the unique needs of professionals in their organization and the culture and context in which implementation will occur. Performing an organizational audit early on will provide a roadmap to guide implementation efforts. Once an audit is completed, the following areas should be attended to.

First, change leaders are encouraged to begin by leading their organization in a period of collective stock-taking that is inclusive of the ideas and perspectives of all

personnel. They might begin by asking questions such as, who are we? Where are we going? How are we going to get there? Such questions can begin the often difficult process of focusing the attention of the organization inward by reflecting on collective purpose and mission. The final component of this reflective process is the adoption of innovative ideas that might be used as tools to support the achievement of these agreed upon goals. By first taking-stock of the mission and goals will lead to the innovation being viewed not as the outcome itself, but instead as a useful tool to support the organization's achievement of its mission and goals.

Second, throughout the process, senior leaders and champions must recognize the symbolic impact of their language and actions on the energy and attention given to the effort by mid- and entry-level staff. In short, if implementation is not perceived as a priority of key leaders, it is not likely to be a focus of professionals throughout the organization. Therefore, change leaders should provide persistent and consistent communication that goes beyond grand proclamations to include everyday conversations and ongoing discussions of the effort during staff meetings, as an example. The key point is that maintaining the dialogue in formal and informal settings is essential to preserving momentum.

Third, beyond communicating that implementation is indeed a priority, senior leaders would be wise to foster an environment that encourages and supports creativity in putting innovative ideas into practice. This can be achieved by granting permission to staff to try new things, promoting a culture of reasonable risk-taking, creating the time and space for staff to plan for and then engage in the implementation process, and

publicly recognizing that implementation is likely to occur in different ways across different units.

Fourth, attention must be given to the development of communication systems that encourage, not merely allow, multi-directional information sharing throughout the organization. As implementation unfolds, senior leaders benefit from maintaining a ground view perspective that informs where they direct their attention and how they might adjust their allocation of resources. Likewise, mid- and entry-level professionals are more apt to maintain a sense of agency and engagement in the effort if they are able to communicate emergent challenges, provide recommendations for resource allocation, and receive timely responses to their requests.

Fifth, the technical and leadership capacity of professionals in the organization must be bolstered. In regards to technical capacity, senior leaders must carefully consider the appropriate timing and pacing of professional development. For instance, too much, too early without appropriately scaffolding the interventions can quickly overwhelm staff. However, insufficient attention to developing the technical capacity initially may lead to heightened frustration among professionals ill prepared to put the innovation into practice. Consequently, incorporating a just-in-time training and development strategy that is responsive to emergent staff needs is encouraged.

Finally, in regards to leadership capacity, because of the significant role of mid-level professionals in guiding implementation in individual units, incorporating strategies for enhancing their understanding of and ability to lead implementation is absolutely essential. Ideally, the effort to enhance leadership capacity should be ongoing, responsive, tailored to the specific needs of the staff, appropriate for the organizational

context and culture, occur one-on-one or in small groups, and be developed and carried out by experts from within the institution.

Conclusion

My goal at the outset of this study was to provide change leaders and post secondary administrations a nuanced understanding of the implementation process and offer recommendations to enhance their efforts. With this goal in mind, I examined the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* in three divisions of student affairs. How implementation unfolded in the three cases was presented in chapters four, five, and six. Each case provided a vivid picture of the complicated and messy nature of implementation and organizational change that practitioners no doubt recognized and scholars have previously noted (Collins, 2001; Creamer, Creamer, & Ford, 1991; Eckel & Kezar, 2002; Heifitz, 1994; Kotter, 1996). Because of significant variations across the cases, each was included in its entirety using the research questions to frame their presentation. This was done so that administrators and change leaders who recognize components of their own organization, its culture, or implementation process in the cases might use them to reflect on their own experience and guide future decision-making and behaviors. Although each case provided a unique story of how implementation occurred, common findings did emerge across sites.

In this final chapter I provided an analysis across the cases and shared a number of findings and implications for research and practice that stemmed from them. I also presented a metaphor that tied together many of the findings while taking into account the complexity of the process and the mediating influence of the culture of each organization. Like many earlier scholars (e.g., Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Kuh, 1994; Lick, 2002), I believe

that change leaders are wise to develop a nuanced understanding of their organization's culture in advance of implementation. However, I extend this recommendation in two ways. First, I argue that change leaders should view culture as a road map, not a barrier. By attending early to understanding how and why their organization and its myriad components operate as they do, change leaders will be increasingly likely to successfully frame the utility of the innovation in a manner that makes good sense throughout the organization. Second, because of the cascading nature of implementation and the significant role of mid-level professionals in the effort, ample attention must be paid to furthering their understanding of the culture and prominent subcultures in the organization. Once this occurs, mid-levels professionals' capacity to lead implementation must be enhanced. Likewise, the technical capacity of professionals throughout the organization must be bolstered in ways that connect to the ongoing effort and are appropriately timed.

The implementation of innovation is hard. It is messy, complicated, exciting, fun, exhausting, and invigorating. It is also necessary in an era in which calls for reform are persistent and postsecondary institutions are expected to do more with less (Bok, 2006; Collins, 2005; Diamond, 2002; Duderstadt, 2000; Friedman, 2005; Gensheimer, 2009). Although scholars differ on the utility of engaging in planned change in postsecondary organizations (Birnbaum, 2000; Collins, 1998; Dooris, Kelley, & Trainer, 2004; Woodward, Love, and Komives, 2000), leaving organizational improvement to chance seems foolish. While it may be true that the complexity of implementation and change are too great to be captured by a single model (Kezar, 2003), change leaders can benefit from developing an increasingly nuanced understanding of how implementation unfolds.

The metaphor of the river delta captures the complexity of the implementation process, provides a framework to help individuals throughout organizations make sense of it, and suggests useful mindsets for change leaders and champions to help them move their organization forward.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for being willing to participate in my study of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* at your institution.

Purpose: I am interested in learning more about how “program X” was planned and implemented. In particular, I want to understand what factors affected its implementation, how they were handled, and who played what role in getting the initiative off the ground.

Procedures: I will be asking a number of open-ended questions. As I indicated in the initial invitation letter, I would like to audio-tape these interviews so that I am able to recreate accurately what you say. If you would like to say something and prefer for it not to be recorded, please tell me, and I will turn off the tape recorder. All tapes, transcriptions, forms, and other documents will be coded, with pseudonyms used in place of names and institutions to safeguard the participants and institutions’ identities to the greatest extent possible.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Consent: Review and sign two consent forms; give one form to the participant.

Make sure that digital recorder is ready. Start interviewing.

Background

As you know, I am interested in understanding how *Learning Reconsidered* was implemented here at [X University]. Specifically, I’m interested in understanding how you implemented [program X].

1. Can you begin by sharing with me a bit about yourself and your role and work here at [X University].
2. How would you describe your division of student affairs to a colleague at a different institution?
3. Now, thinking back to when the decision was made to adopt *Learning Reconsidered*. Can you share what you remember about some of the key events that led up to that decision?

It is my understanding that [program X] was developed/redeveloped as a result of the divisions decision to adopt *Learning Reconsidered*. I want to spend some time talking how that all happened.

4. Please begin by telling me a bit about [program X].

5. Now, can you share with me a bit about how [program X] was developed and implemented?
6. So, overall, what do you think explains why things happened as they did with the implementation of [program x] after the division decided to adopt Learning Reconsidered?
7. Who else do you believe I should speak with to understand how the program was implemented?

Closing Statement

Thank you for spending time with me and sharing your insights. I will be sending you a transcript of the interview and my initial impressions of this interview as soon as possible. You will have an opportunity to read and revise your responses.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Backward Mapping the Implementation of an Innovative Idea in Higher Education: The Case of *Learning Reconsidered*

Researcher and Title: Eric R. Jessup-Anger, Doctoral Candidate

Department and Institution: Educational Administration, Michigan State University

Address and Contact Information: 411 N. Clemens Ave., Lansing, MI 48912; 303.547.2924; jessupa2@msu.edu

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study seeking to understand the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* at your institution. *Learning Reconsidered* was a national report that reconceptualized the role of student affairs in higher education released in 2004. You have been selected as a participant in this study because of your position or association with the institution being studied and your unique vantage point during the implementation and organizational change process. From this study, the researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of how divisions of student affairs implement innovative ideas and the organizational change process associated with their implementation. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by Eric Jessup-Anger, a doctoral student in the Department of Education Administration at Michigan State University.

In the entire study, it is expected that approximately 30 people at three separate institutions are being asked to participate. Your participation in this study will take about 60 minutes for the initial interview with a possible follow-up interview either in person, on the phone, or via email. If you are under 18, you cannot be in this study without parental permission.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

You will be interviewed by Eric Jessup-Anger, a doctoral student in Educational Administration at Michigan State University. You will answer a series of questions concerning your experiences and perceptions of the implementation of *Learning Reconsidered* and the associated organizational change process at your institution.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a copy of the findings of the research study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic, or both.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Benefits which might be gained by participating in the research study include a forum for reflecting on your experiences with the implementation process with an interested interviewer and insights into student affairs, your division of student affairs, or yourself as a result of the process.

POTENTIAL RISKS

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences. Potential psychological risks include becoming emotionally distraught while being interviewed because of a difficulty encountered in your position in general or with the implementation process or organizational change in particular. As a reminder, you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate the interview. Appropriate referrals may be made during the interview for support services.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because the study involves face-to-face interviews, participants cannot remain anonymous. However, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. A pseudonym will be used in transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data. The researchers, members of the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board, and the faculty advisor overseeing the dissertation are the only individuals that will have access to participant information.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If you agree that I may do so, you may request at any time that recorder be turned off. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location until the study is completed, at which time they will be erased.

I agree to allow audio taping of the interview.

☐ Yes ☐ No Initials _____

The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researcher in a secure location until the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. The contact information will be kept until the end of the study in case there is need for you to clarify information originally provided or in case the researcher would like to obtain your feedback on how the data was documented or interpreted. The contact information form will be kept in a separate secure location than that of the digital recordings. The results of this study may be published or presented at

professional meetings, but the identity of the research setting and the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw with no penalty for doing so. You may also choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the primary investigator Dr. Marilyn Amey, Professor in the Department of Education Administration, 427 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, (517)432-1056; amey@msu.edu or Eric Jessup-Anger, 411 N. Clemens Ave, Lansing, MI, 48912, (303)547-2924; jessupa2@msu.edu.

If you have any questions about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Director of MSU's Human Research Protection Programs, Dr. Peter Vasilenko, at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Signature

Date

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