

Common Issues in Professional Behavior

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Most conversations about ethics and professional behavior involve case studies and hypothetical situations. This study identifies and examines the most common concerns in professional behavior as reported by 303 student affairs practitioners in the field. Differences by gender, years of experience, organizational level, institutional type, and institution size are also explored.

Violations of professional behavior and ethical conduct seem to be reported with increasing frequency by the news media. No profession appears to be immune. Stories of corporate greed (Neumiester, 2007); bribery of public officials (Drinkard & Kelley, 2005); illicit sexual conduct by religious leaders ("Four Defrocked," 2005) and teachers ("Teacher-Student Sex," 2005) appear all too frequently on the nightly news and in the daily newspapers. In the world of professional sports, athletes in all kinds of competitions use banned substances to enhance their performance on a regular basis ("Bonds Apologizes," 2007). The list is all too long.

Concerns about professional behavior in higher education are prevalent and mirror the ethical issues of the larger society. Just a few recent examples include: conflicts of interest between faculty members and

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companies for which they consult (Mangan, 2002), misuse the financial and other resources of the institution (Brownstein, 2002; Lowery, 2002; Wills, 2005), sexual harassment and sexual misconduct (Smallwood, 2003; Fogg, 2006), misrepresentations of academic credentials (Wilson, 2003), and violations of other laws (Farrel, 2003).

Student affairs professionals face the same type of concerns as other professionals. They routinely interact with students, colleagues, and other administrators in situations that involve ethics. Further, a major goal of student affairs is professional practice or professionalism, where all actions—educational and personal—are linked to the highest forms of principled conduct (Winston & Creamer, 1998).

To behave professionally, student affairs professionals must have a clear understanding of ethics and the role of professional standards in their practice. To this end, professional organizations provide guidance to members through standards of practice and codes of ethics (Benshoff, 1990; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 1997; Evans, 2001; Hotelling, 1990; Kitchener, 1985; Young, 2001). They conduct conferences with themes centered around ethics and professional behavior, and they publish literature in their journals concerning professional standards in the field.

Literature in the field of student affairs examines theoretical ethics and their implications for the profession (Kitchener, 1985; Lampkin & Gibson, 1999; Thomas, 2002). Analyses of multiple perspectives on ethics held by student affairs professionals give practitioners options for addressing ethics and ethical dilemmas in the workplace (Sundberg & Fried, 1997; Humphrey, Janosik, & Creamer, 2004) including discussions of the theoretical challenges posed by ethics (Benshoff, 1990; Fried, 1997a, 1997b; Kuk & Donovan, 2002; Talley, 1997; Winston et al., 2001; Young, 2001). The use of ethics in supervision and staff development, for example, has been shown by some scholars to be essential to excellent practice (Benshoff, 1990; Talley, 1997; Winston & Creamer, 1998). Others call for practicing ethical behavior as a way to guide the campus conscience (Talley, 1997; Young, 2001).

Despite the discussion of professionalism and professional behavior, there is little student affairs research about the behavioral concerns

practitioners face in their work. This study sought to fill this void in the literature.

The purpose of this research was to determine the most common concerns faced by student affairs professionals in their professional behavior by reexamining data previously reported by Janosik, Creamer, and Humphrey (2004). The findings may: (a) help professional associations as they consider updating or rewriting their codes of conduct, (b) stimulate conversation about professional behavior in student affairs and in professional preparation programs generally, and (c) help student affairs professionals develop more effective solutions to common concerns in professional behavior facing practitioners in the field.

Several questions guided this research, such as:

1. What types of concerns about professional behavior do student affairs administrators face in their current positions?
2. Do administrators of different genders, level of experience, or professional position report different types of concerns about professional behavior?
3. Do administrators working at different types and sizes of institutions report different types of concerns about professional behavior?

Method

Because the focus of this study was to first explore the concerns about professional behavior as expressed by student affairs practitioners and then to determine if these concerns were commonly shared by different groups of professionals, a mixed methods approach was used. Qualitative methods and a grounded theory approach were used to collect and analyze data in the initial stages of the inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open-ended questioning and grounded theory analysis were well suited to explore a range of possible experiences among a similar group of participants (Creswell, 1998).

Once a list of common concerns was identified, I wanted to determine if these concerns were shared by subgroups of participants. Quantitative methods were used in the second stage of this inquiry.

Observed frequencies were compared with expected frequencies using chi-square tests to determine if there were any significant differences.

Participants

Because I wanted to identify common concerns about professional behavior faced by groups of student affairs administrators with varying degrees of experience and in various organizational positions, members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) were selected as participants in this study. With the help of the NASPA national office, e-mail addresses for 800 members were drawn at random from the NASPA membership directory. A random number generator was used to ensure that every member had an equal chance of being selected.

Procedures

I prepared a simple six-item electronic questionnaire. Five items were demographic in nature. Participants were asked to identify the type and size of their current institutions, their gender, the organizational level of their current position, and their level of professional experience. The last item on the questionnaire asked respondents to describe briefly two to three concerns they had encountered recently with respect to professional behavior in their current positions.

Once the e-questionnaire was developed, I, through the NASPA office, sent an introductory e-mail message to each NASPA member selected as part of the sample. The message outlined the purpose of the study and contained an electronic link to the Web site where the questionnaire was located.

Two reminders were sent to all participants in the sample at 10 and 20 days past the date of the original e-mail invitation. These follow-up e-mail messages thanked those who had responded, reported on the response rate to the questionnaire as of that date, and encouraged those who had not responded to do so. A final e-mail message was sent to the sample, alerting everyone to the end date of the study and the deactivation of the Web site.

Data Analysis

Individual responses ranged from two or three sentences containing a few dozen words to several containing two paragraphs. Data analysis was ongoing. Open coding was used initially. Axial and selective coding were used in subsequent analyses to develop themes or categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using a constant comparative strategy, emerging themes and categories were collapsed and refined.

Trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998) was established during the data analysis and data interpretation processes. Two researchers examined individual responses independently. Once two lists were developed, the pair shared their categories with one another. These categories were adjusted and refined and a common definition for each was created. Then, working together, items were reviewed again and each was placed in a single category. After all items were categorized, the team sorted the concerns by category and reexamined each group of concerns to ensure that each label captured the essence of the issue being presented. Then, categories that were closely related were collapsed and refined.

Once this qualitative procedure was used to label each concern, differences among the various demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, years of experience, organization level, institution type, and type) were examined using chi-square analyses. The observed frequencies were compared to expected values given the demographic proportions among the respondents.

Results

A total of 303 (38%) NASPA members responded to the questionnaire. They expressed 580 concerns (1.9 per respondent) for analysis. The characteristics of the respondent group can be found in Table 1. Because similar demographic data were not available from the national association, cross validation using chi-squares could not be completed to determine if the respondent group was demographically representative of the association's membership.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Respondent Group (*n* = 303)

| Characteristic | Number | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|--------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Female | 170 | 56 |
| Male | 133 | 44 |
| Organizational Level | | |
| Entry-level | 60 | 20 |
| Mid-level | 127 | 42 |
| Upper-level | 116 | 38 |
| Experience | | |
| 1 – 3 years | 68 | 22 |
| 4 – 6 years | 48 | 16 |
| 7 years or more | 187 | 62 |
| Type of Institution | | |
| Public | 214 | 71 |
| Private | 89 | 39 |
| Size of Institution | | |
| 1 – 4,500 | 93 | 31 |
| 4,501 – 7,500 | 210 | 69 |

As a result of the iterative data analysis process previously described, I placed responses into 19 discrete categories of concerns. These categories and codes are defined in Table 2.

Table 2
Definitions of Categories

| Code | Category | Definition |
|-------------|--|--|
| RFP | Respect for Privacy | Situations that involved the sharing of private/protected information about others |
| RPC | Respect for Personal Choice | Situations that involved substituting one's judgment for another's when that other person is capable of choosing |
| FAIR | Fairness | Situations that involved the inequitable treatment of those in substantially similar positions |
| COI | Conflict of Interest | Situations that involved overlapping business relationships with others that may result in inappropriate favoritism or create the appearance thereof |
| PAT | Patronage | Situations that involved the inappropriate use of power to secure exceptions for relatives |
| ICPE | Inconsistent Policy Enforcement | Situations that involved the inconsistent application of existing institutional policies or procedures |
| SR | Scholarship and Research | Situations that involved the falsification or misuse of data or reports |
| ST | Special Treatment | Situations that involved the inappropriate granting of exceptions to individuals or groups |
| OTA | Obligation to Act | Situations that involved self-examination about the right course of action |
| AI | Appropriate Interpersonal Interactions | Situations that involved mentoring, socializing, and other forms of interaction where no rule or law is broken or where no favoritism is granted |
| II | Inappropriate Interpersonal Interactions | Situations that involved inappropriate socializing between staff, faculty, or students that may involve violations of rules or laws |

Table 2, continued

| Code | Category | Definition |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| ISI | Inappropriate Sexual Interactions | Situations that involved incidents of sexual or amorous conduct between persons sharing dual relationships or incidents involving sexual harassment |
| MS | Misstatement of Facts | Situations that involved misleading others by sharing false or incomplete information |
| MNR | Misuse of Non-Academic Resources | Situations that involved the inappropriate use of institutional property or other tangible resources |
| MAR | Misuse of Academic Resources | Situations that involved some dishonest act to gain an academic advantage |
| CON | Contract Violations | Situations that involved behaving in a way that is contrary to stipulations found in written or verbal agreements |
| LOY | Loyalty | Situations that created uncertainty of choice or loyalty given multiple responsibilities inherent in one's position in the organization |
| NONE | None | Situations where respondents indicated that they had experienced no concerns about professional behavior in their current positions |
| UNCL | Unclassified | Situations where respondents made statements about themselves, their positions, or their institutions without identifying specific concerns about professional behavior |

Once the concerns were categorized, frequencies were calculated ($N = 580$) and placed in rank order. Forty items were placed into the category labeled "none." This label was used to describe those respondents who said they had not experienced any professional concern in their current positions. An additional 40 items were labeled "unclassified." This category was used to describe responses where participants made statements about themselves or their institutions but did not express any concern about professional behavior. All of these responses were eliminated, leaving 500 responses for further analysis.

Reported concerns were tallied by category and displayed in rank order. To determine if the magnitude of the concerns were shared, chi-square tests were conducted among five subgroups of respondents (i.e., gender, organizational level, years of experience, type of institution, and size of institution). These data can be found in Table 3.

Concerns involving an “obligation to act” were ranked first (21.0%). Most often respondents indicated they were unsure when to report inappropriate behavior of others to their supervisors or when to intervene with others who may be contemplating doing something that may not be in their best interest. This issue was expressed evenly across all respondent groups. There were no differences based on gender, organizational level, experience, or institutional size or type.

Issues involving “fairness” accounted for 12.4% of the behavioral concerns reported by respondents and was ranked second overall in the list. Respondents expressed first- or second-hand knowledge of situations where similarly situated students and staff members were treated inequitably in 62 instances. Those with less than 4 years of professional experience reported 11% of the instances involving lack of fairness. Their colleagues who had 7 or more years of full-time experience in student affairs reported 77% of this total. These values were much different than was expected, and this difference was significant ($\chi^2 (2, n = 303) = 7.03, p = .03$).

Inconsistency in policy enforcement was identified in 50 (10.0%) of the common concerns identified by respondents and was the third most frequently mentioned behavioral problem. In these analyses, entry-level positions in their organizations reported 12% of these concerns. Their upper-level counterparts reported 54% of the total. These values were much different than was expected, and this difference was significant ($\chi^2 (2, n = 303) = 5.73, p = .05$). Respondents at smaller institutions reported concerns about inconsistent policy enforcement at significantly higher rates (58% of the total) than expected when compared to their colleagues at larger institutions (42% of the total) ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 17.04, p = .001$); and finally, respondents at private institutions reported this type of problem at significantly higher rates (58% of the total) than expected when compared to their colleagues at public institutions (42% of the total) ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 4.86, p = .03$).

“Respect for privacy” was ranked fourth in the list and accounted for 9.6% of the total. These concerns involved someone sharing information that was considered confidential. Respondents consistently referred to “stretching” the need to know information and the need of some professionals to “be in the know” as the motivations for this unprofessional behavior. Others stated that too many colleagues talked about their students as a part of idle conversation with other staff members when there was no need. No significant differences were observed when frequencies by group were examined.

The fifth most frequently mentioned professional concern involved “loyalty issues.” Forty-six (9.2%) of the 500 concerns expressed by respondents involved questions about when to tell a supervisor that they may be seeking a new job or that they may have already made contact with potential employers. The majority of these problems involved situations where the anticipated response to sharing such information would most likely be negative. This issue was expressed evenly across all respondent groups. There were no differences based on gender, organizational level, experience, institutional size or type.

“Special treatment” was reported in 36 (7%) instances and was sixth on the list of most frequently reported concerns. Respondents defined special treatment as behaviors where inappropriate exceptions were granted to special groups or individuals based on their status with the institution. Athletes and individuals falling into certain protected class categories were most often identified as the beneficiaries of this special treatment. Those with less than 4 years of professional experience reported 10% of the instances involving special treatment. By comparison their colleagues who had 7 or more years of full-time experience in student affairs reported 77% of the total. This difference was significant ($\chi^2(2, n = 303) = 7.93, p = .02$).

The “misuse of non-academic resources” ranked seventh on the list. Respondents reported 35 (7%) examples where institutional property was taken or used in some unauthorized manner. The misuse of computers, taking office supplies home, and misallocating departmental funds were some of the more common examples. Respondents at larger institutions (more than 4,500 students) reported 89% of these concerns, and this proportion was much higher than expected. On the

Table 3
Frequencies of Common Concerns in Professional Behavior

| Concerns | Number | Percent | Rank |
|--|--------|---------|------|
| Obligation to Act | 105 | 21.0 | 1 |
| Fairness ³ | 62 | 12.4 | 2 |
| Inconsistent Policy Enforcement ^{2,4,5} | 50 | 10.0 | 3 |
| Respect for Privacy | 48 | 9.6 | 4 |
| Loyalty Issues | 46 | 9.2 | 5 |
| Special Treatment ³ | 36 | 7.2 | 6 |
| Misuse of Non-academic Resources ⁵ | 35 | 7.0 | 7 |
| Misstatement of Facts | 29 | 5.8 | 8 |
| Inappropriate Interpersonal Interaction ¹ | 25 | 5.0 | 9 |
| Respect for Personal Choice ⁴ | 22 | 4.4 | 10 |
| Appropriate Interpersonal Interaction ^{1,2,3} | 13 | 2.6 | 11 |
| Inappropriate Sexual Interaction | 11 | 2.2 | 12 |
| Conflict of Interest | 6 | 1.1 | 13 |
| Patronage | 5 | 1.0 | 14 |
| Misuse of Academic Resources | 3 | 0.6 | 15 |
| Contract Violations | 3 | 0.6 | 15 |
| Scholarship and Research | 1 | 0.2 | 17 |
| Total | 500 | 100.0 | |

1 = significant difference based on gender, 2 = significant difference based on organizational level, 3 = significant difference based on experience, 4 = significant difference based on institutional type, and 5 = significant difference based on size.

other hand, their counterparts at smaller institutions (4,500 students or less) reported such concerns at significantly lower (11%) than expected frequencies ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 6.27, p = .01$).

“Misstatements of facts” was ranked eighth in the list and accounted for 5.8% of the total. Respondents reported incidents where supervisors and colleagues made intentionally false statements to protect themselves or others from some negative consequence or to gain some advantage. This issue was expressed evenly across all respondent groups. There were no differences based on gender, organizational level, experience, or institutional size or type.

Respondents cited 25 (5%) inappropriate interpersonal interactions, and this concern ranked ninth on the list of most common concerns. Staff members reported several instances where staff supplied alcoholic beverages to underage students or were present when students were consuming alcoholic beverages illegally. The second category of inappropriate interactions concerned close friendships between supervisor and supervisee that resulted in some form of favoritism. Eighty percent of these concerns were expressed by women, and this proportion was much higher than expected. The remaining 20% of these concerns were expressed by men. This difference was significant ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 5.84, p = .02$).

“Respect for personal choice” was ranked tenth, and it accounted for another 4.4% ($n = 22$) of the concerns expressed. This concern involved situations where professionals communicated a lack of support for the professional development or personal relationship decisions of others. Respondents at private institutions reported half (50%) of the issues concerning “respect for personal choice.” Respondents at public institutions reported the remaining 11 incidents. Because of the much smaller number of respondents at private institutions, this difference in proportions (observed vs. expected) was significant ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 5.72, p = .01$).

“Appropriate interpersonal interactions” was the label used for concerns where there were no misconduct or rule violations but an issue was raised about the appearance of the behavior. The most common example involved instances where staff members consuming alcoholic

beverages legally and responsibly were seen by staff members or students who were not of legal age. The other common concern in this category involved staff members being seen in public with other staff members or subordinates. In the subsequent chi-square analyses, women reported 84% of these concerns. Men reported the remaining 16%. Women reported such incidents in much higher numbers than were expected ($\chi^2 (1, n = 303) = 4.95, p = .03$). Entry-level professionals reported 61% of these concerns. Their upper-level counterparts reported 8% of such concerns. The differences between the reported and expected values, given their proportion among respondents group, were significant ($\chi^2 (2, n = 303) = 11.73, p = .001$). Finally, professionals with less than 4 years of experience reported 61% ($n = 8$) of these concerns. Respondents with more than seven years of experience accounted for the remaining 39% ($n = 5$). The differences between the reported and expected values, given their proportion among respondents, were significant ($\chi^2 (2, n = 303) = 6.68, p = .04$).

Each of the remaining six categories of concerns was mentioned fewer than 12 times and each contributed 2% or less of the total. Chi-square values could not be calculated because cell frequencies were too small. In order of frequency these concerns were: inappropriate sexual interaction ($n = 11, 2.2\%$), conflict of interest ($n = 6, 1.1\%$), patronage ($n = 5, 1.0\%$), misuse of academic resources ($n = 3, 0.6\%$), contract violations ($n = 3, 0.6\%$), and conduct related to scholarship and research ($n = 1, 0.2\%$).

Discussion

Problems involving an “obligation to act” were reported most frequently, and this is not surprising. In many instances, these situations involve individual judgment and may be intertwined with important ethical issues such as respecting autonomy and doing no harm. Determining exactly when to intervene or when to share information with others is not always easy, nor do such situations lend themselves to a single set of standard procedures. It is reassuring to note, however, that this group of student affairs professionals reported being most concerned about trying to do the right thing for the right reason.

“Respect for privacy” was the third most commonly reported professional issue. Some respondents indicated problems with how the Family Educational Records Privacy Act was being interpreted and how student record information was being shared. This is an area where additional training may be needed to reduce these concerns.

Others voiced concern about how often staff members engaged in gossip. Sharing information that others did not have, even when sharing such information was inappropriate, was characterized as one way to demonstrate “status;” and this caused a great deal of frustration among those who reported this type of issue. While common in every work setting, this is perceived by respondents in this study as a problem in need of serious attention.

“Loyalty” was the fifth most commonly reported professional issue. Respondents of all types indicated concerns about multiple reporting lines and multiple allegiances. The most common theme in this category involved when to tell supervisors about future employment plans and the apprehension connected with such a conversation. Decades ago, the job search process, in the main, was confined to a few months that coincided with the major national conferences held in the spring of each year. Today, this process is much more fluid. Jobs are advertised year-round and student affairs professionals take advantage of the opportunity to advance their careers whenever the possibility arises. Still, the decision to place one’s career advancement ahead of the needs of the institution or employer appeared to be a difficult one, regardless of one’s status in the organization. Making conversations about staff members’ career development plans a regular part of the supervision, staff development, and performance appraisal processes could elevate many of these concerns and conflicts (Winston & Creamer, 1998; Janosik, Creamer, Hirt, Winston, Saunders, & Cooper, 2003).

“Misstatement of facts” ranked eighth in the list of common problems. Covering up mistakes and improving one’s position seemed to be the motivations behind this behavior. Creating less competitive or more supportive work environments may help reduce the need to be dishonest in this way.

Gender Differences

In this study men and women identified common problems in personal interactions in significantly different ways. Women, as opposed to men, were much more likely to report experiences with inappropriate social interactions that involved socializing between staff, faculty, or students that involved violations of rules or laws. These incidents most often involved the illegal use of alcoholic beverages and under-age drinking. It could be that women are more sensitive to these issues since the irresponsible use of alcohol is so often a part of sexual assaults or forms of regretted behavior. An alternative explanation may be that men do not consider the illegal use of alcoholic beverages a “real problem” or are less sensitive to the harm caused by inappropriate social interactions (Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004).

Women also reported a greater number of concerns about “appropriate social interactions.” These incidents were defined in this study as mentoring, socializing, and other forms of interaction where no rule or law is broken or where no favoritism was granted. Despite the breakdown of some sex-role stereotypes and some double standards, it may be that this group of women was still more concerned about appearances of propriety than their male counterparts.

Experience and Organizational Position

Respondents with 7 or more years of experience in the organization reported greater than expected numbers of problems having to do with “fairness” and “special treatment” than respondents with less than 4 years of experience. Conversely, less experienced staff members reported a greater number of concerns about “appropriate social interactions” than expected. With respect to organizational position, upper-level professionals reported a significantly greater number of incidents involving “inconsistent policy enforcement” and significantly fewer incidents involving “appropriate interpersonal interactions” than entry-level professionals.

Position in the organization and years of experience are related. Higher-level positions usually require more years of experience. It may be that years of experience and level of position allow one to “see more” and create “more opportunity” to experience or know about sit-

uations involving fairness and equity. Scope of one's position, knowledge of the institution, and knowledge of the profession and its standards may all contribute to one's ability to recognize what is or is not appropriate (Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004).

Size and Type of Institution

Respondents who were employed at institutions with less than 4,500 students reported a significantly greater than expected number of instances involving inconsistent policy enforcement but fewer than expected instances involving the misuse of non-academic resources when compared to their colleagues at larger institutions. Hirt (2006) suggests that smaller institutions are less bureaucratic in nature (p. 49) and professionals, because of the smaller organizational structures, tend to be generalists (p. 95). Professionals at smaller institutions may focus less attention on rules and regulations or have less knowledge about them. Alternatively, professionals at large institutions tend to view themselves as specialists in a more narrowly defined area of expertise because of the larger organizations structures (Hirt, 2006). Their work environment may be more rigid, and their success may depend upon being able to follow the rules. These organizational dynamics may explain why respondents at smaller institutions reported greater numbers of incidents involving inconsistent policy enforcement.

Hirt (2006) also suggests that professionals at larger institutions view their workplaces as competitive environments that encourage a sense of elitism. The creation of a sense of privilege may allow individuals to rationalize decisions to misuse institutional resources. In larger institutions, staff members may also feel fewer connections with a common ideal or set of standards. Individuals in larger organizations may feel "very isolated" (Hirt, 2006, p. 103). This lack of connectiveness or accountability may create an environment where the misuse of non-academic resources is more common (Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004). Smaller institutions may also be able to create a greater sense of community, be able to reinforce a commitment to a particular set of standards, or may be able to hire staff members who are more homogeneous in their views of professional behavior and thus, may experience fewer incidents of this type (Janosik, Creamer, & Humphrey, 2004).

Respondents at private institutions reported a greater number of concerns about inconsistent policy enforcement than expected. They also reported a greater number of concerns about personal choice than their colleagues at public institutions. In this study size and type were highly correlated. Sixty-two percent of the private institutions enrolled fewer than 4,500 students and 86% of the public institutions enrolled 4,500 students or more. It is likely that professionals at private institutions work in smaller, less bureaucratic organizational structures; are generalists, not specialists; and depend less on rigid rule enforcement to be successful. Following the rules at private institutions may not be as highly valued when compared to the organizational mores of public institutions.

If the smaller institutions in this study are religiously affiliated, personal commitment to prescribed moral or religious tenets could also help explain why professionals at private institutions reported a greater number of concerns about respecting personal choice. Fewer degrees of personal freedom may exist in private institutions and the expectation to conform to a better-defined code of behavior may be greater. Regardless of the explanations, these findings lend credence to Hirt's (2006) belief that the administrative culture at different types of institutions is different and that "where you work does matter."

Limitations

All methodologies have their limitations, and this study was no exception. Although participants in this study were drawn at random from one of the largest national associations representing student affairs administrators, the respondent group is not likely to be representative of the population. Generalizations should be avoided.

Self-report data has its shortcomings, but there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of these reports. Respondents were promised confidentiality, and there was little if any risk to the participant.

Efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, but others might have coded the data in different ways and achieved different results. Still, the essence of the problem and the labels that were applied are easily understood and hopefully will resonate with the experience of other professionals. The identification of these common

concerns in a systematic way provides a different perspective from which to view this topic. If these findings do nothing more than stimulate additional conversation about professional behavior and professional standards, the research will have served its purpose.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to identify common concerns about professional behavior in the student affairs field. Knowing more about why these problems present themselves in our organizations is worthy of study. Some of these problems might stem from insufficient knowledge. If so, these issues might be rather easily addressed. Supervisors can do a better job of clarifying expectations, educating, and confronting behavior that falls below established standards. Professional preparation programs can be modified to focus more attention on ethics and professional standards. Associations can provide more intentional professional development activities on these same topics. Professional associations might also make specific modifications to statements on professional standards and codes of ethics to address the issues expressed by this group of student affairs professionals.

If character or attitudes towards others are the genesis of these concerns, solutions will be more difficult to find. Building character, creating shared value systems, and changing organizational climate are not achieved in a single staff meeting or by writing new policy. The identification of common concerns in professional behavior and the differences among selected demographic groups provides a valuable place to begin. Those concerned about such matters should look for opportunities to collect information in their own work settings and use that information as a way to stimulate more conversation about issues in professional behavior.

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