Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree Doctor of Education with an emphasis in Educational Practice

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Thriving in Student Affairs Professionals: An Exploration of Supporting Constructs

Date: July 16th, 2021    Time: 10:00 am to 12:00 p.m.    Place: Remote

Abstract
This study sought to understand more about the broad constructs under which student affairs professionals thrive. Thriving is rooted in positive psychology and this study specifically focused on workplace thriving. Seligman's theory of thriving (PERMA) provides the foundation for this study. Student affairs professionals provide vital services to the students at their institutions of higher learning, all while facing various challenges that impact their ability to thrive at work. Understanding the constructs that support thriving for student affairs professionals will help institutional leaders and professional organizations develop work environments and strategies that promote thriving. The world experienced a global pandemic during the time of this research, allowing exploration of how COVID-19 impacted thriving. This study also included variables of generation and functional areas to explore if there were variations of thriving in those subsets.

To test the research questions that address various aspects of thriving in student affairs professionals, an online survey known as the Thriving Quotient, developed by Dr. Laurie Schreiner, was modified for use in this population. The survey looked at PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment) constructs, along with Schreiner's predictors of thriving in higher education (sense of community, spirituality, institutional integrity and commitment to staff welfare). The survey was administered to student affairs professionals at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. Responses were analyzed using a variety of statistical tests. Results indicated that student affairs professionals at this institution were thriving. There was a positive relationship between all PERMA constructs to overall thriving. Three of the four predictors contributed to overall thriving with commitment to staff welfare not having an impact. There was no impact of generation or functional area to overall thriving. The results showed that COVID-19 impacted thriving.

Although results suggested that while student affairs professionals at this institution were generally thriving, there are ways to further support thriving. The researchers encourage the institution to address issues related to commitment to staff welfare, as this was a predictor of thriving. This study provides a discussion on ways the institution might continue to bolster thriving among student affairs professionals.

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