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Organic Outreach for Academic Libraries: Collaborating with Student Affairs Units to Reach College Students

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Collaborating with Student Affairs Units to Reach College Students

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Abstract

The college campus is a complex ecosystem of services and resources. Academic library outreach efforts offered in partnership with Student Affairs units can support the whole student as they navigate this ecosystem. This presentation offers one librarian's experience collaborating with Student Affairs units such as health, counseling, and recreation centers. A mental model for this work that draws on the metaphor of organic gardening helps frame the remarks and reflections.

Introduction

This presentation shares my reflections on my work collaborating with Student Affairs units on library outreach to college students, including the mental models I employ in this work. I hope this presentation will offer you:

- a new framework for thinking about your library's outreach to students and/or collaborations with Student Affairs offices – and I'll be sharing 4 frameworks total, or

- inspiration to try a new collaboration with Student Affairs, or a new approach to an existing collaboration, to support your library's outreach to students

The topics the presentation will cover include:
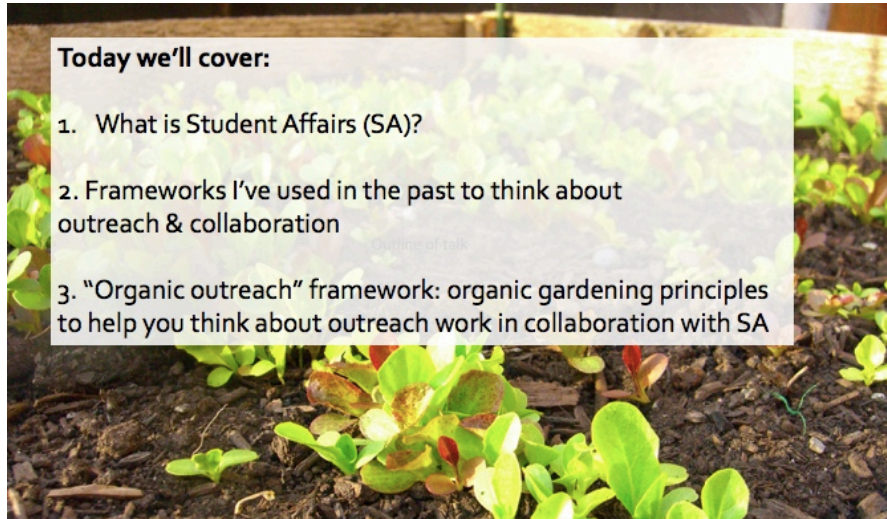
One teaser of the content: by the end of this session you will have learned how partnering with a Student Affairs department allowed JMU Libraries to attract 3,494 new students to an event in our libraries without direct advertising or promotion work on our part.

About Student Affairs

Working with Student Affairs professionals has been of interest to me since about 2011, when I began supervising two graduate assistants from the Student Development Administration graduate program at the university where I was a librarian.

These students taught me a lot about their field, which is called these various names:
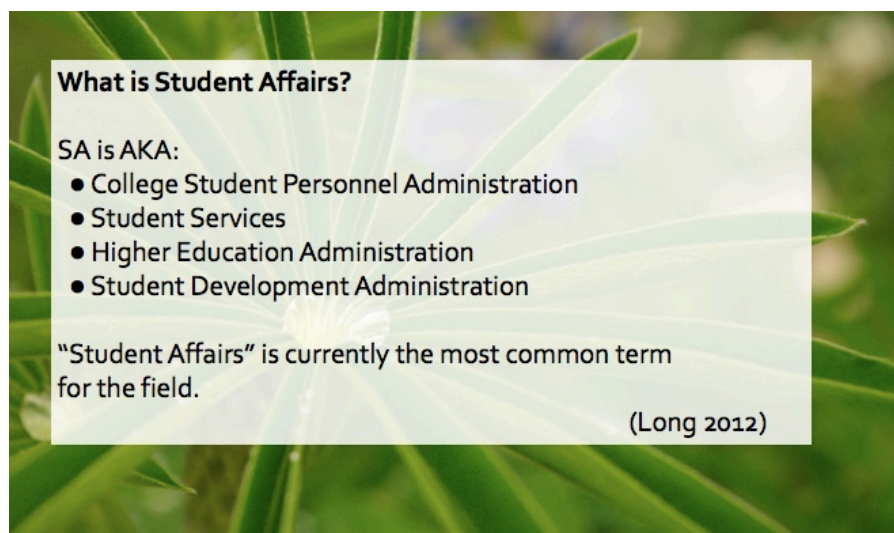
In this presentation, I'll be calling the field "Student Affairs," which is the most common phrase today (Long 2012).

Working with the Student Affairs graduate assistants taught me that student learning is also about student development (Long 2012). They also helped broaden my perspective beyond my focus on information literacy and library awareness. My experience with the Student Affairs students helpe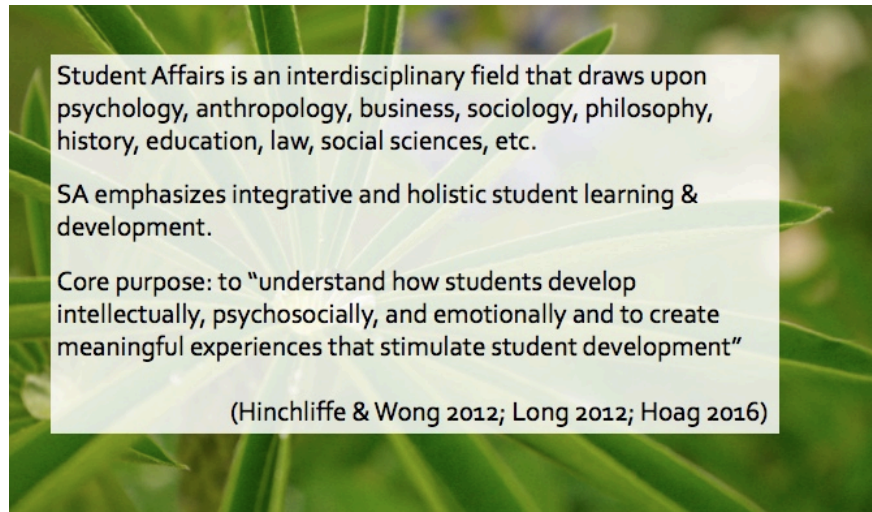d me realize that I wanted to think more about student development and work on connecting more effectively with my Student Affairs peers.

But what *is* Student Affairs as defined by the literature, not just from my perspective, informed by these two students? According to the literature, it's an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the whole student. It emphasizes learning and multiple facets of development, including emotional development.

> Student Affairs is an interdisciplinary field that draws upon psychology, anthropology, business, sociology, philosophy, history, education, law, social sciences, etc.
>
> SA emphasizes integrative and holistic student learning & development.
>
> Core purpose: to "understand how students develop intellectually, psychosocially, and emotionally and to create meaningful experiences that stimulate student development"
>
> (Hinchliffe & Wong 2012; Long 2012; Hoag 2016)

Student Affairs includes multiple departments or functional areas, like residence life, counseling centers, and academic advising. Each university has a different mix of these departments.

For some context on Student Affairs, here is how one Student Affairs division — the one at JMU — currently summarizes its work:

> **What Student Affairs professionals at JMU do:**
>
> "We **provide support services, programs and resources** so that student learning is engaged, relevant and applied.
>
> We **help students learn** what they need to know and what they don't know they need to know.
>
> We help build and maintain the culture of the institution toward belonging and community.
>
> We help JMU **address the changing needs of students.**
>
> We help our students learn accountability and how to overcome challenges by achieving an effective balance of challenge and support."
>
> From www.jmu.edu/studentaffairs/mission.shtml

(Retrieved from http://www.jmu.edu/studentaffairs/mission.shtml in September 2018. The bolding is mine.)

When I reflect on this summary of Student Affairs work at JMU, I'm struck by how the first two statements are similar to some of the work we do in libraries. Also, I believe that library workers could benefit from Student Affairs expertise in the area of "address[ing] the changing needs of students." Thus, to me, it makes sense for academic libraries and Student Affairs units to support each other and collaborate when possible. Such an approach might help us both achieve our goals more effectively and efficiently.

Now that I've introduced Student Affairs, I'd like to get a sense of your experience and knowledge on this topic, via a show of hands and an online poll:
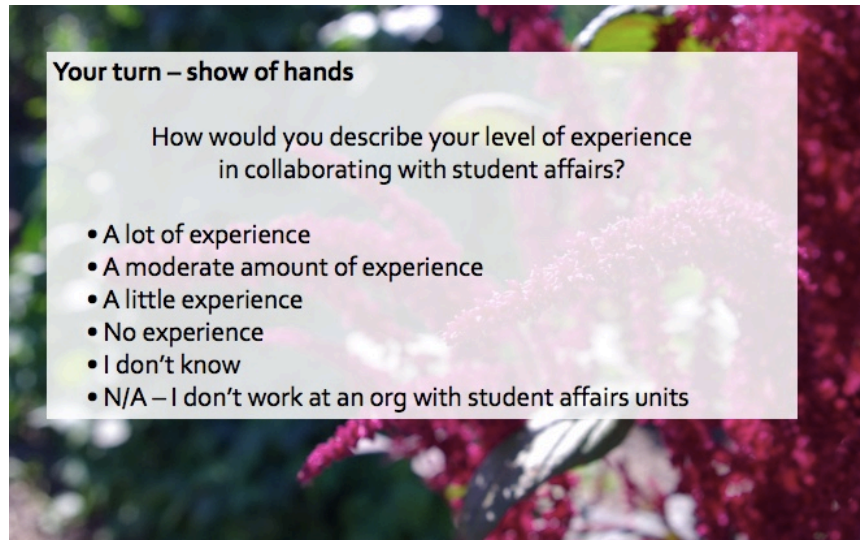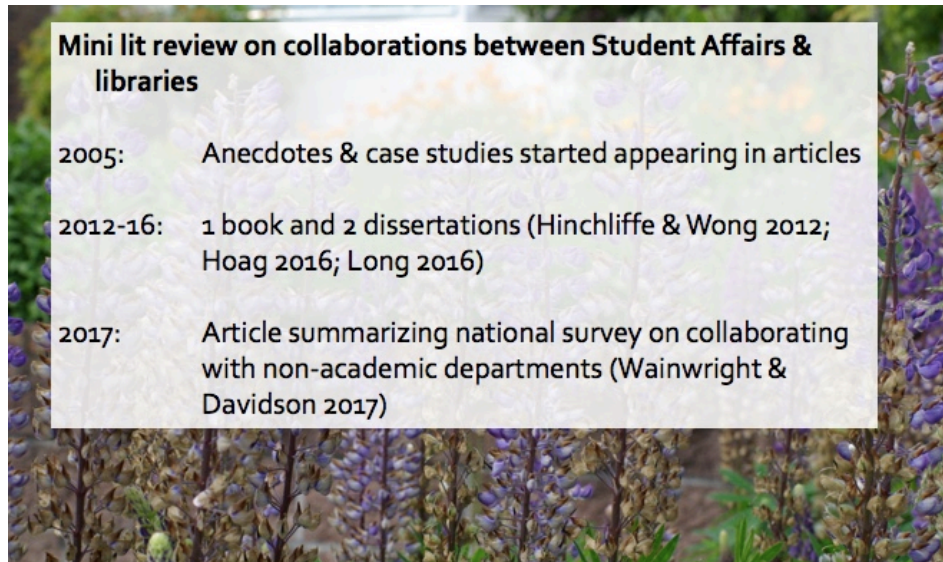

Online poll results:
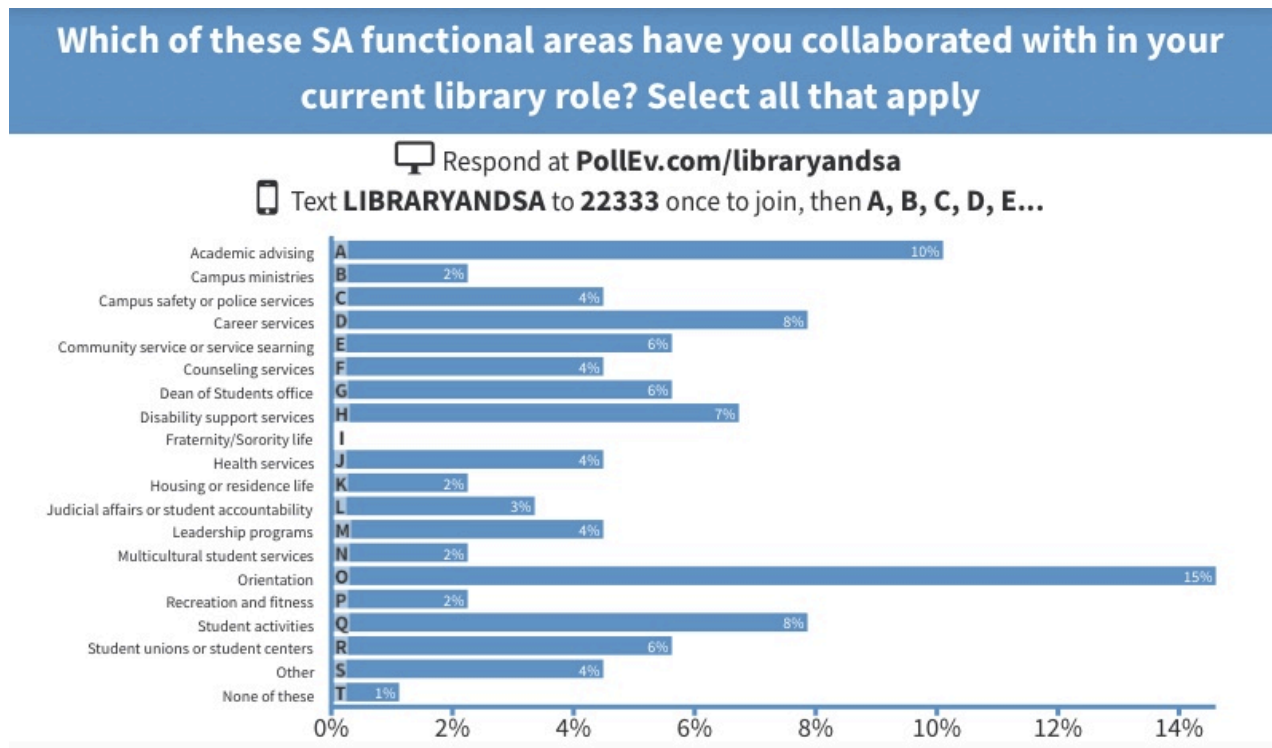
The top functional areas that session participants had collaborated with included Orientation, Academic Advising, Student Activities, and Career Services. The popularity of partnering with Orientation was also reflected in the literature review.

Literature Review

Library workers' interest in working with Student Affairs is evident in the library literature starting around 2005, a few years before I became interested in it. Most articles from the past 13 years are short case studies or anecdotes about successes, such as:

- "Libraries and Student Affairs: Partners for Student Success" (Swartz, et al. 2007)
- "Meeting the student learning imperative: Supporting and sustaining collaboration between academic libraries and student services programs" (Walter & Eodice 2007)
- "Creating connections: Library instruction across campus" (Tag, et al. 2007)
- "Student Affairs Connection: Promoting the Library through Co-Curricular Activities" (Crowe 2010)
- "Putting the shhhhh in student activities: Creating a partnership with your library (Hoag & Sagmoen 2012)

In 2012, ACRL published a book on the topic, "Environments for Student Growth and Development: Libraries and Student Affairs in Collaboration," which I recommend if you want to read more.

In 2016, two dissertations were published on the topic, one by a Student Affairs professional and one by a librarian:
- "Librarians and Student Affairs Professionals as Collaborators for Student Learning and Success" (Long 2016)
- "Opposites or Perfect Partners: Student Affairs and Libraries in Collaboration to Advance Student Learning" (Hoag 2016)

More recently, a national survey was conducted on the topic of academic libraries collaborating with all types of non-academic departments, including but not limited to Student Affairs (Wainwright & Davidson 2017). This is a slightly broader focus than that of this literature review, but it was one of the first national looks at the issue.

Some of the themes and findings from this literature include:

Findings/themes in the literature on collaborations between Student Affairs & libraries:

- Prevalence
- Common cause of collaboration
- Popular Student Affairs partners
- Popular collaborative offerings
- Commonality in library & Student Affairs offerings
- Barriers to collaboration
- Benefits to collaboration
- Strategies to increase/improve collaboration

- Information on how prevalent these collaborations are. The results from the 2017 survey indicated that a little over half of the libraries surveyed have collaborated with Student Affairs departments (Wainwright & Davidson 2017).

- A common cause of collaboration. Multiple authors have pointed out that collaborations between Student Affairs departments and libraries often begin because a non-library service moves into a library, or the campus creates a "learning commons" in the library (Wainwright & Davidson 2017; Crowe 2010; Hoag 2016).

- Popular Student Affairs partners for libraries. The most frequently cited partnerships are with Orientation and First-Year Experience programs (Hoag 2016). This was also evident among the answers from the people participating in this conference session (see page 4).

- Popular offerings for libraries collaborating with Student Affairs. In the recent national survey, the most common ways that libraries partner with Student Affairs are: participation in partner-hosted events (31%), partner participation in library-hosted events (14%), and partner-sponsored events/services held in the library (13%) (Wainwright & Davidson 2017).

- Commonalities between libraries and Student Affairs offerings. The literature acknowledges that both Student Affairs departments and libraries offer important co-curricular or outside-the-classroom learning experiences, and both have some

flexibility in their programming, because they're often not tied to the curriculum (Hinchliffe & Wong 2012; Maio 2012; Hoag 2016; Swartz, et al. 2007).

- Barriers to collaboration between Student Affairs professionals and academic librarians, including (Grabsch, et al. 2018; Hoag 2016; Scott & Verduce 2012; Crowe 2010; Swartz, et al. 2007; Lockwood, et al. 2012, LePeau 2015):
    - o Lack of time
    - o Lack of knowledge and interaction between the professions
    - o Individual resistance to collaboration
    - o Work in libraries and in Student Affairs is rewarded and valued in different ways

- Benefits to collaboration between libraries and Student Affairs, including (Grabsch, et al. 2018; Hoag 2016; Hoag & Sagmoen 2012; Scott & Verduce 2012; Crowe 2010; Swartz, et al. 2007; Lockwood et al. 2012):
    - o Libraries can reach more students
    - o Libraries can learn from their Student Affairs colleagues about large-scale programming, which people in Student Affairs often have more experience with
    - o Student Affairs can reach students who spend time in the library, some of whom may not spend time in Student Affairs-centered spaces
    - o Student Affairs professionals can learn about information literacy from librarians
    - o Students can benefit from reciprocal referrals and improved services due to library staff and Student Affairs staff learning about each other's services & expertise

- Research-informed strategies to increase collaboration between libraries and Student Affairs, including (Hoag 2016):
    - o Identify common ground
    - o Create mutually beneficial goals
    - o Create formal and informal ways to learn about each other's services and expertise

Mental models about outreach and partnerships

Now that we've covered the definition of Student Affairs and some of the literature on how libraries and Student Affairs work together, I'll share two mental models of outreach and partnerships that I have used in the past, plus a bonus model that I recently discovered in the literature, before moving on to my new model, "organic outreach." I'm sharing these previous mental models in case they are of more use to you than my current model, and also to share the evolution of my thinking.

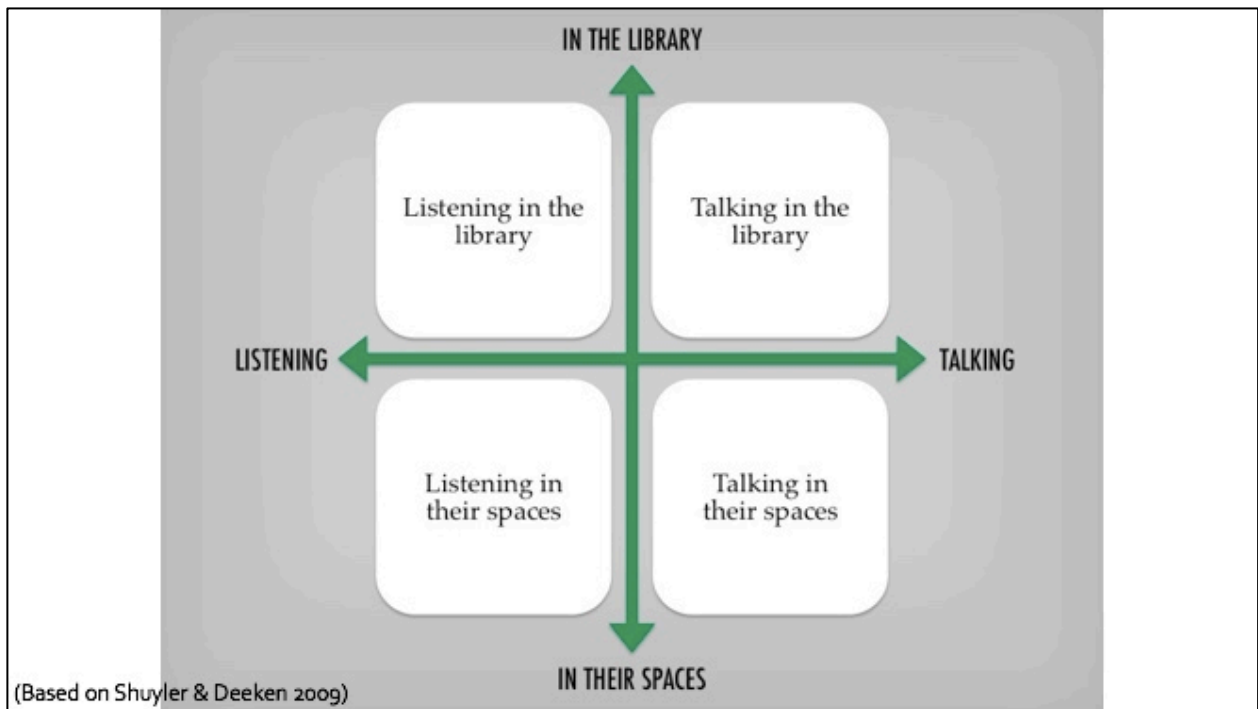My previous mental models or frameworks for outreach and partnerships:

• Outreach as a conversation

• Academic partnerships continuum

Also...

• Partnerships pathways

The first mental model, or framework, that I developed for my work was outreach as a conversation. In this model, library outreach to students should be thought of as a conversation that includes both listening and talking. This conversation needs to happen both in the library spaces and in the students' spaces (both physical and digital/metaphorical spaces).

Taking these concepts and putting them on 2 axes results in four quadrants of outreach activities to think about:

IN THE LIBRARY

Listening in the library

Talking in the library

LISTENING

TALKING

Listening in their spaces

Talking in their spaces

IN THEIR SPACES

(Based on Shuyler & Deeken 2009)

Here is an example of how one library's outreach activities could be mapped onto this "outreach as conversation" framework:
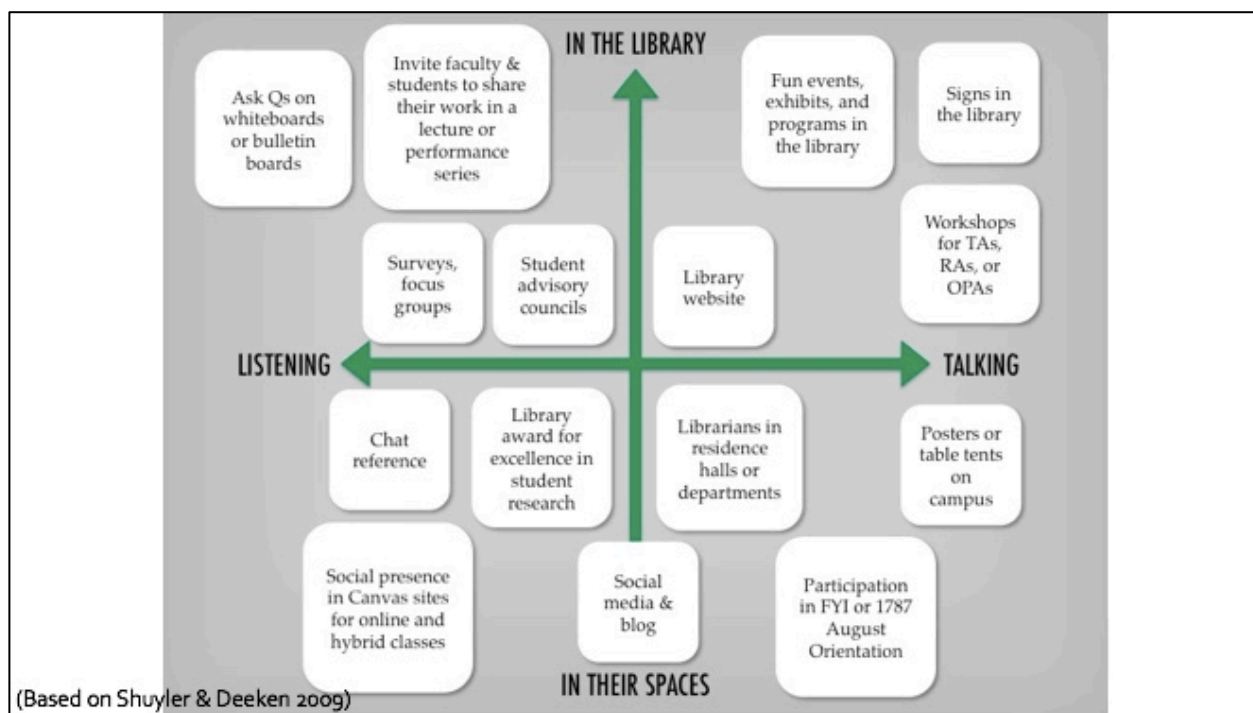
For example, hosting an event is a type of talking in the library, whereas running a student advisory council is a form of listening in the library. Participating in a campus-wide orientation is a form of talking in the students' spaces, and being on social media is both listening and talking in students' spaces.

One way I've used this framework is to frequently ask myself if I was pursuing work in all four quadrants. I find that this helps me remember to design ways for the library to listen better, and to be in students' spaces when possible.

This framework doesn't involve partnerships with Student Affairs – other than the examples of collaborations with Orientation and Residence Life – but I wasn't working with Student Affairs when I developed it.

When my role changed and I became our library's "liaison" to our university's Student Affairs departments, I started thinking about how I should update my mental model of outreach. I started by adding into my thinking a model of partnerships. This came from a preconference that I participated in, called "Student Affairs and Academic Affairs Partnerships," at NASPA, which is one of the major Student Affairs conferences.

The "academic partnerships continuum" (Grabsch, et al. 2018) has four categories of partnerships.

Academic Partnerships Continuum:

Support

Exchange

Cooperate

Collaborate

(Grabsch 2018)

1. Support. This category includes transactional partnerships, such as a library allowing a Student Affairs department to host an event in the library facility.

An example of "support" at my library is "Ask A Nurse," which is a service run by the University Health Center. A few times a month, a nurse is available in the libraries' lobbies to answer students' questions and hand out freebies from the Health Center.

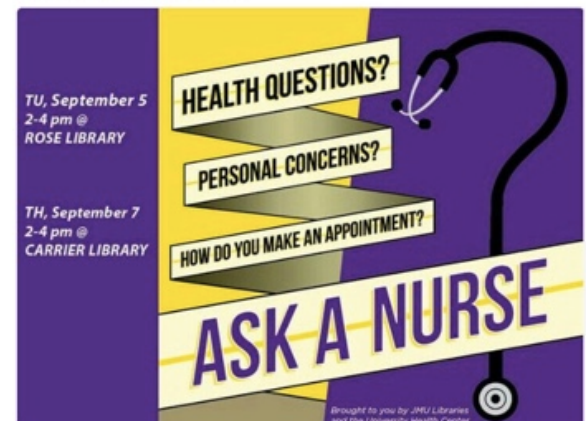Example of a "support" type of partnership

2. Exchange. This category includes mutually beneficial partnerships, such as working together to plan one new event that meets both library and Student Affairs goals.

An example of an "exchange" partnership at my library is "De-Stress for Success," a program during which we offer multiple de-stressing options/activities in the libraries near the end of the semester. Many of these activities are offered in partnership with Student Affairs offices. For example, we have worked with University Recreation (or UREC) at JMU to offer yoga in the libraries, because it met UREC's goal of getting students to move and be healthy, and it met our goal of supporting students as they're spending long hours studying in the library during finals.

Example of an "exchange" type of partnership

Similarly, we have worked with the Counseling Center to host coloring tables in the libraries during finals. We offer the space, furniture, supplies, and the overall planning and promotion. The Counseling Center provides brochures about their services, including their studio, which has coloring and creative supplies. Also, Program Assistants from the Counseling Center sit at the tables in a loose staffing/hosting model. They also make creative displays about self-care and stress to accompany the table.

Example of an "exchange" type of partnership

Photo by JMU Marketing & Communications; used with permission

In the photo to the right, the counseling center brochures and the display (made by the Counseling Center's Program Assistants) are visible.

3. Cooperate. This category of partnerships refers to coordinated, long-term, or recurring efforts, such as co-creating a multi-year program offered by both library & Student Affairs staff.

4. Collaborate. This category represents integrated partnerships for which a library and a Student Affairs department share full responsibility. For example, the Dartmouth College Library has a "house librarian program" which integrates librarians into their new undergraduate housing model (Barrett & Harding 2017).

The speakers at the preconference where I learned about the "academic partnerships continuum" emphasized that if you use it, you do not need to think about moving from support to collaborate – the model does not imply that moving along the continuum is the best thing to do. It is simply a way to categorize the partnerships work that you do.

I found another model for Student Affairs & Academic Affairs partnerships in the literature. The research underlying this model focused on diversity and inclusion initiatives. The three "pathways to partnerships" (LePeau 2015) in this model are:
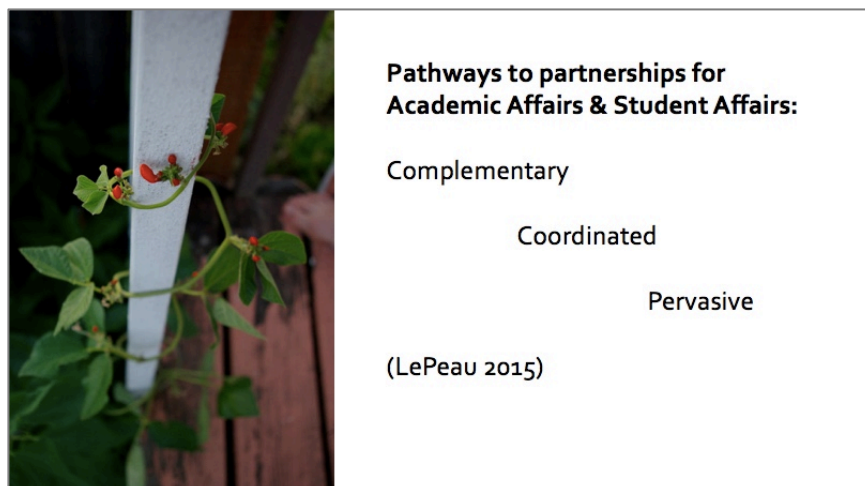
- **Complementary:** Both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs support diversity and inclusion, but in different ways.

- **Coordinated:** Academic Affairs and Student Affairs share a vision about supporting diversity and inclusion, communicate across units, and blur the lines of roles.

- **Pervasive**: Academic Affairs and Student Affairs not only share a vision about diversity and inclusion, communicate across units, and blur lines (as in the Coordinated pathway), they also challenge cultural and power contradictions, work toward shared governance, and consider everyone on campus an educator.

Current mental model: Organic outreach through partnerships with Student Affairs

When my job was redefined in 2016 and I became the library "liaison" to the eleven Student Affairs departments at JMU, I was invited to attend the monthly meetings of the directors of those departments. This been a wonderful experience that allows for sharing information and making connections. I appreciate hearing about student life from the perspectives of experts, such as the head of the Counseling Center. By attending these meetings, I also began to understand how complex our campus is – I learned about programs and services for our students that I had never heard of before. And I learned about some of the demanding work requirements for student employees in Student Affairs departments, especially in Orientation and Residence Life. Taking in all this new information, I began to realize that to combine my outreach work and my

Student Affairs partnerships work (a goal of my position), I would need to create a new mental model for my work. My previous mental models – which separated out partnerships from outreach – were no longer sufficient. So, as I gained experience in this area, I began to develop a mental model based on principles of organic gardening, a hobby and interest of mine.

I began with the acknowledgement that the university is a complex ecosystem, as I had really started to internalize during these Student Affairs directors meetings. Over time, and after re-browsing some of my favorite gardening books, I developed three principles to help me organize my thinking about my work in outreach and partnerships.

Principle 1: Sustainable design

The first organic outreach principle, based on my experience and reflection, is that of sustainable design.

One of my favorite gardening books says that, "Frank Lloyd Wright wrote about 'organic architecture,' or design that works with the relationships between people, places, and buildings. Similarly, organic or sustainable garden design builds on the relationships between people, places, and plants… [it's] a cooperative, intuitive process that emphasizes links to natural environments" (Lovejoy 2007, p. 10).

Principle 1:
Sustainable design

Start by understanding the environment.

So, for instance, when working with a marshy, boggy area, a sustainable design approach wouldn't involve draining it and making a lawn – instead, it would involve choosing plants that do well in a bog, or even digging it out a bit and make a pond.

With this sustainable design principle, I'm arguing that "organic outreach" should build on the relationships between people, departments on campus, and the campus environment.

The first step toward sustainable design in outreach is understanding the people, departments, and campus environment. The second step is designing an approach that works well with these, like choosing the right plants for a specific area.

An example of sustainable design from my practice is an event that I designed and coordinated for our library – this is the event that I mentioned at the start of this talk. We welcomed almost 3,500 new JMU students into our library facilities one evening during JMU's Orientation in August 2018. Our goal was to get all new students into one of our two main libraries and involve them in fun activities to help them feel comfortable and welcome in the library spaces. About 70% of the new students

participated, according to our door counts – and we didn't have to advertise or promote the event to the new students.

The reason it was possible without advertising is that the event integrated with the Orientation schedule (the "environment"), and the needs of the people involved in the program.

In my first three years at JMU, during which I led the library's participation in a different part of Orientation, I learned about the full, intense schedule for new students during Orientation. In the Student Affairs directors meetings, I also learned about the work that First-Year Orientation Guides (or FROGs), who are student employees, do while guiding the new students through Orientation. Over those years, I also developed a working relationship with Orientation staff. When the Libraries' Student Advisory Board advised us to bring the new students into the library during Orientation, I was able to brainstorm with a staff member in Orientation to create an event that fit into the Orientation schedule.

We scheduled the library event during a 4-hour-long block of time already in the Orientation program, called "Chillin' With Your FROG." This "Chillin'" time in the schedule was when FROGs took their groups to dinner, and then spent some time together, either doing an activity that the FROG organized, or just hanging out. Orientation staff explained that the FROGS and the new students were often tired by this time, three days into the Orientation week. We thought that by offering the FROGs an activity in the library, they could take advantage of it instead of creating an activity for their group. We designed it as a casual, drop-in, fun event with multiple, optional activities in both main libraries. When the FROGs brought their groups to the library, they were allowed to choose an activity, or to just hang out in the building, which many of them chose to do.

Because the event was intentionally designed to meet the needs of the FROGs and the new students and to be integrated into the Orientation schedule, the Orientation Office was able to do all the event promotion for us. They communicated with the FROGs about our event in the same ways that they communicate with them about any other item on the Orientation schedule.

We recruited about 50 Libraries employees to help run the event, which turned out to be fun, popular, and successful. Here is a video that captures the spirit of it:
https://twitter.com/jmulibraries/status/1037722566058758145

When I met with my Orientation contact in the week following the event, she agreed that it was a success and that we should do it again next year, with minor revisions.

Principle 2: The soil is alive

The next organic gardening principle that I've found helpful in my outreach and partnerships work is that the soil is alive.

Organic gardeners focus on building the soil. The productivity of a farm or garden depends on the quality of the soil. And it's the life in the soil – the millions of microbes, bacteria, nematodes, fungi, worms, microarthropods, plant roots – that make it fertile. These organisms help the soil hold nutrients, retain moisture, act as a pH buffer, and more (Markham 2006). Soil quality can be enhanced through adding compost, through cover cropping, and crop rotation, and other techniques (Markham 2006).

Principle 2:
The soil is alive

Focus on building the soil.

Soil is so full of life that it has its own complex food web, with predatory as well as mutually relationships between organisms, all happening in what some folks might think of as "dirt."

The way that this principle guides me in my work with Student Affairs is that it reminds me that I need to take the time to nourish the relationships I have with Student Affairs colleagues. While some collaborations result in visible successes like our Orientation event, others, like the soil under a garden, are less visible or obvious.

An example for this principle is work that colleagues and I did last academic year to intentionally develop our library's relationship with the Career and Academic Planning (CAP) office on campus. A librarian colleague, a CAP colleague, and I all had a mutual interest in learning more about each other's offices and services. We met several times last academic year to discuss issues of mutual interest, such as career-related library databases and CAP's book collection. We also talked about the ACRL information literacy framework and how it relates to the seven competencies for new college grads developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, a major association for the Career and Academic Planning profession.

One of the outcomes during this year of relationship-building was bringing together the liaison librarians and the career and academic advisors, who also operate within a liaison structure, so that they could meet each other, share information on how they communicate with the students in their departments, and talk about how to cross-promote their services. This work relates directly to a finding from one of the dissertations that I referenced: that a "strategy to increase collaboration should be to

increase formal and informal knowledge sharing experiences" among librarians and Student Affairs staff (Hoag 2016).

With this principle, I'm arguing that collaboration focused on sharing information and building professional relationships is very important for partnering with Student Affairs, and for the sustainable design of outreach work. Like building the soil, this work takes time and it results in sometimes-invisible outcomes – but they're visible to people who know how important the soil is to the garden.

Principle 3: Stacking functions

The final organic outreach principle is stacking functions (Hemenway 2000). This is a concept derived from permaculture. It has two main rules:

Principle 3:
Stacking functions

Each element of a design should perform more than one function.

Each function should be performed by more than one element.

First, each element of a garden design – such as a plant or structure – should perform more than one function. Plants perform many functions – hold soil in place, manage moisture levels, bring nutrients from deep below them up to the top layer of soil by dropping leaves, convert atmospheric nitrogen into usable nitrogen in the soil, prepare the soil for other plants, attract pollinators, attract predators that eat pests, provide medicine, feed wildlife, help each other thrive – such as with companion planting – provide shade, create a windbreak, offer habitat, create microclimates, and feed humans.

One example is bamboo – this photo is from my back yard. Bamboo provides nest material for birds, prevents erosion on a slope, provides us with bamboo shoots for dinner, gives our yard some privacy and shade, and provides us with construction and craft materials.
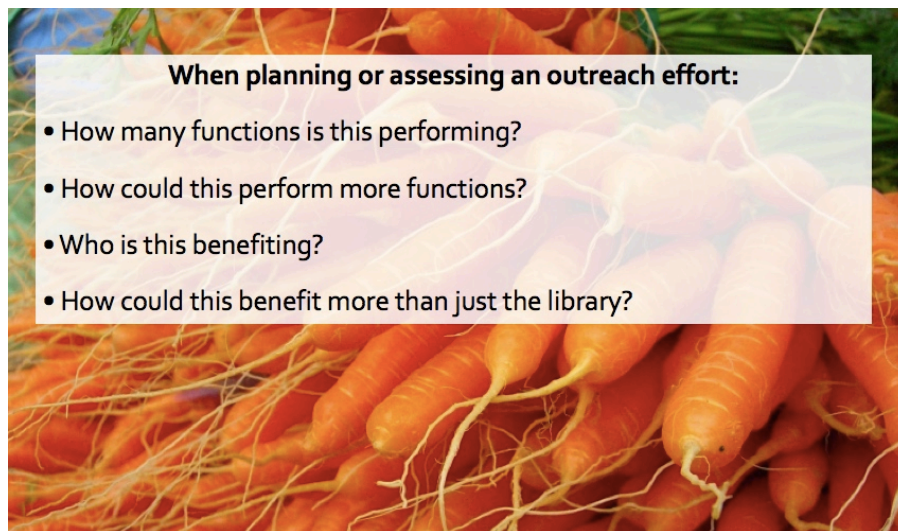
Recognizing and building on this multifunctionality of plants is a way to build an efficiency into the design of a garden.

The second rule of stacking functions is that each function or job to be done in a design should be performed or supported by more than one element of the design. The idea
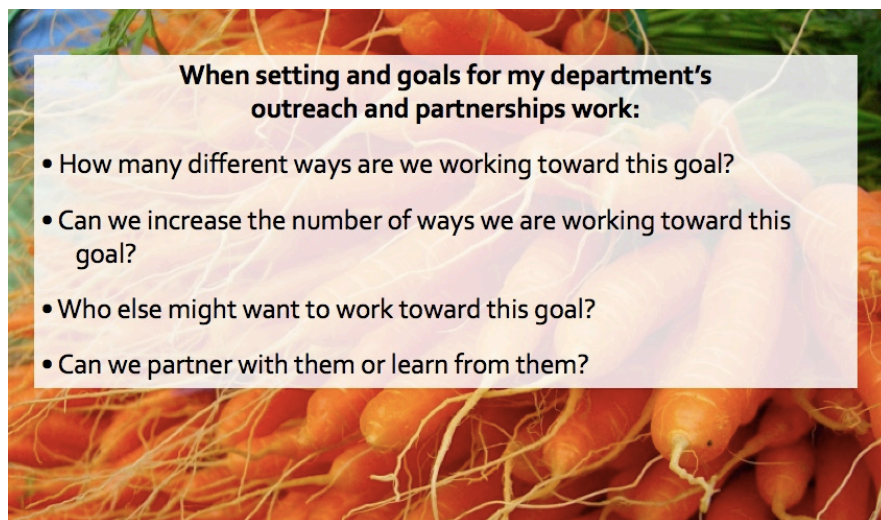
here is having backups in place. For example, in our home garden, we plant multiple types of vegetables in case one fails – and if they don't fail, then we have more to choose from. Also, different vegetables ripen at different times of the year. Planting multiple types of plants is a sort of planned redundancy and diversity in a garden design.

When a garden is designed with the principle of stacking functions in mind, the garden is often self-regulating, providing its own fertilizer, weed suppression, and food all year-round. By stacking functions, a gardener consciously re-creates and imitates natural systems, rather than trying to control or manipulate the environment (Hemenway 2000, page xiii).

To translate the principle of stacking functions into my work with outreach and partnerships, especially with Student Affairs, I often ask myself these questions when planning or reflecting on my outreach efforts:

When planning or assessing an outreach effort:

• How many functions is this performing?

• How could this perform more functions?

• Who is this benefiting?

• How could this benefit more than just the library?

And when I'm setting goals for my department's work, I often ask myself:

When setting and goals for my department's outreach and partnerships work:

• How many different ways are we working toward this goal?

• Can we increase the number of ways we are working toward this goal?

• Who else might want to work toward this goal?

• Can we partner with them or learn from them?

Two examples of my library's outreach efforts performing multiple functions, in collaboration with Student Affairs:

The first example is our "De-Stress for Success" program, introduced earlier. The coloring tables serve multiple functions: they offer students a way to take a break, bring a fun and creative activity to the Library spaces, and help get the word out about the Counseling Center's services. This is an example of the first part of the stacking functions principle.

Example of "stacking functions"

And by offering coloring tables, yoga, puzzles, therapy dogs, aromatherapy and more, we provide more than one way that students can find wellness support in the library during finals. This is an example of the second half of the "stacking functions" principle – redundancy and diversity.

A second example of stacking functions is our library's new Student Advisory Board. Last year, I re-envisioned our Student Advisory Board as one primarily composed of students who serve in various Student Affairs offices and groups on campus – student employees and student leaders. Student Affairs offices help us recruit the members of the board. For instance, recent and current board members include:
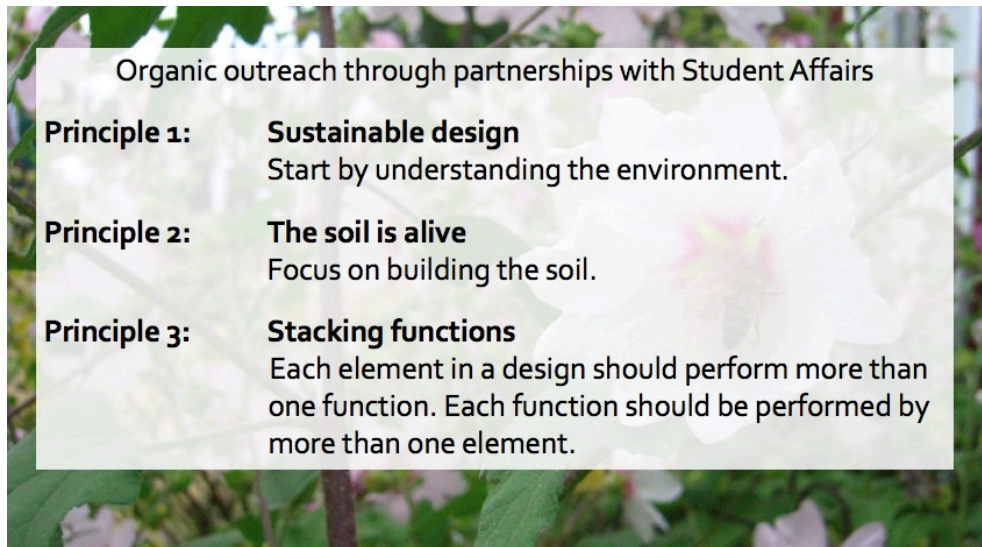
- Two representatives from student government, which is part of the office of the Dean of Students (a Student Affairs office)
- One Peer Access Advocate who works in the Office of Disability Services (a Student Affairs department)
- One graduate assistant from the LGBTQ & Ally Education Program (which is part of the University Health Center, a Student Affairs department)

The Advisory Board serves many "stacking functions" – the board meetings help us to get students' feedback on our ideas, hear their ideas about the library, ask student leaders to promote the library to their friends and colleagues, get inside information on

how to communicate with students, and more. Also, having multiple members means that even with difficulty in scheduling, we always have a few students at each board meeting. And their multiple students represent a diversity of perspectives too. This is the second half of the stacking functions principle – redundancy and diversity.

Summary of the organic outreach model

The three principles of the organic outreach model are:

Organic outreach through partnerships with Student Affairs

Principle 1: Sustainable design
Start by understanding the environment.

Principle 2: The soil is alive
Focus on building the soil.

Principle 3: Stacking functions
Each element in a design should perform more than one function. Each function should be performed by more than one element.

Conclusion

I believe that collaborating with Student Affairs on library outreach projects is like organic gardening – it is real work that takes a lot of time, it can be unpredictable, but ultimately it is beautiful, and worth it.

I hope one of the four frameworks presented here — organic outreach for academic libraries, outreach as a conversation, the academic partnerships continuum, and partnerships pathways — will be useful in your outreach work, your library's approach to collaborating with Student Affairs, or both.

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