

Spring 2014

# Improving SAASI's Knowledge Management Practices

Ximeng Chen

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## Recommended Citation

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Running Head: Improving SAASI's Knowledge Management Practices

Improving SAASI's Knowledge Management Practices

By

Ximeng Chen

BM, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, 2012

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Masters in Public Administration in the Graduate School of  
Binghamton University  
State University of New York  
2014

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Accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Masters in Public Administration  
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Binghamton University  
State University of New York  
2014

Kristina Lambricht

---

Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies  
Department of Public Administration  
May 6, 2014

Pamela Mischen

---

Associate Professor  
Department of Public Administration  
May 6, 2014

Christina Knickerbocker

---

Director of Student Affairs Assessment and Strategic Initiatives (SAASI)  
Binghamton University  
May 6, 2014

### **Executive Summary**

Binghamton University's Student Affairs Assessment and Strategic Initiatives (SAASI) is facing a variety of problems related to knowledge management (KM). Regarding explicit knowledge, SAASI has no universal format for documenting the analysis process and professional staff and student workers have different skill sets. Meanwhile it receives documents from other departments within Student Affairs Division and those data require a significant amount of time for SAASI to spend on reformatting to make it useable. Regarding tacit knowledge, since many of the student positions are one year appointments, there is a great deal of turnover in the department. The turnover influences the continuity of ongoing projects and transition of knowledge.

To improve the KM practices of SAASI, I conducted interviews with staff members in other student affairs assessment departments at similar universities. Ten individuals from nine universities participated in the interviews. This research led to five key findings: 1) most student affairs assessment departments have graduate student workers and have varieties of strategies to ensure the transition of organizational knowledge between previous and incoming graduate student workers and the continuity of ongoing projects; 2) every interviewee indicated that the student affairs assessment department is not the only party dealing with assessment projects in the Division of Student Affairs; 3) some student affairs assessment departments have not only supportive but also administrative functions which means every assessment project within the Division of Student Affairs needs to go through these departments; 4) some departments utilize information systems to reduce the amount of time spent cleaning data; and 5) only a few student affairs assessment departments have standards and processes for documenting their data analysis procedures but most departments recognize the importance of documentation.

Based on the findings, I am making four recommendations: 1) keep utilizing existing strategies to ensure the transition of knowledge between outgoing and incoming student workers and the continuity of ongoing projects; 2) build the assessment capacities of other departments within the division by offering regular trainings and need-based education; and 3) organize an assessment committee for the division that consists of individuals from different departments who are interested in or capable of conducting assessment projects.

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### **Problem Statement**

Binghamton University's Student Affairs Assessment and Strategic Initiatives (SAASI) is a department within the Division of Student Affairs. SAASI's mission is to provide assessment support services for the departments within the Division (SAASI, n.d.). To accomplish this mission, SAASI helps departments in a variety of ways such as designing assessment projects, creating surveys, and analyzing survey results (SAASI, n.d.). One of the most important projects is the Senior Survey. The Senior Survey is an annual survey distributed to all senior students to gather information on their career related plans and placements after graduation. Three professional staff (2.5 full-time equivalent), three research graduate assistants, one graduate intern, two undergraduate interns, and two undergraduate student assistants currently work for the department.

Knowledge management (KM) is "a set of management activities aimed at designing and influencing processes of knowledge creation and integration including processes of sharing knowledge" (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2003, p.78). Knowledge is divided into two categories: explicit and tacit (Proudfit, 2009). Explicit knowledge includes documents and skills while tacit knowledge includes experience and relationships. SAASI works diligently to manage the department's explicit knowledge. For example, every working computer in SAASI is connected to a shared drive where all the department's documents are stored. If someone in the department makes changes to a document, others are able to see them. As another example, almost every data analysis document contains a documentation page which details the analysis process. In this way, other viewers of the documents know how the results were generated and will be able to repeat the analysis process.

However, despite SAASI's efforts, the office is facing a variety of problems related to KM.



Regarding explicit knowledge, SAASI has no universal format for documenting the analysis process and professional staff and student workers have different skill sets (C. Knickerbocker, personal communication, October 17, 2013). Each staff member approaches documentation in a unique way. Also, SAASI receives documents from the departments such as the Career Development Center with which it works closely. Other departments record and format their data based on their needs. As a result, SAASI staff often needs to spend a lot of time and effort to clean the data so it is usable for SAASI's purposes. Meanwhile, since most graduate assistants have advanced knowledge about statistics that other staff lacks, it is difficult for staff members to understand some of the data analysis that graduate students have conducted. Additionally, staff members are more knowledgeable about Excel and other campus information systems than student workers.

Regarding tacit knowledge, since many of the student positions are one year appointments, there is a great deal of turnover in the department (C. Knickerbocker, personal communication, October 17, 2013). The turnover impacts the continuity of ongoing projects such as the Senior Survey and the accumulation of job-related experience and expertise. Even though SAASI provides opportunities for old and new student workers to work together during every summer to assist in the transfer of knowledge, not all assistants' schedules allow them to do so. As a result of the high turnover among the student workers, it is also sometimes difficult for them to form strong interpersonal relationships both within the department and with other departments.

Finding ways to better manage the department's knowledge is important to SAASI. As an assessment department, the accuracy and integrity of the products the office produces directly impacts its reputation and the extent to which it is viewed as trustworthy. If SAASI is not able to accurately share and document knowledge, it risks making errors. Additionally, as a department

in the University, it is common to have student workers. Other operating models, such as recruiting more full time staff, are not financially feasible so the turnover is inevitable. This makes improving KM practices the only way for SAASI to keep providing high-quality services and to sustain trusting relationships with other departments. The results of this study will help SAASI to better manage its services and thus improve the quality of the information SAASI provides to benefit the decision-making capacities of the University.

The field of public administration is increasingly recognizing the importance of KM (McNabb, 2007). KM helps public agencies to improve service quality, staff performance, and cost-effectiveness (McNabb, 2007). KM also improves the effectiveness of public administration services and functions (Wiig, 2002). More specifically, KM can lead to better decision-making capabilities and improved academic and administrative services in higher education (Kidwell, Vander Linde, & Johnson, 2000). The results of this study will be useful to other assessment offices from different universities facing KM challenges.

### **Research Questions**

How can Student Affairs Assessment and Strategic Initiatives improve its knowledge management practices?

### **Literature Review**

KM is a broad and emerging field which brings “new opinions, capabilities, and practices” to the field of public administration (Wiig, 2002, p.224). Literature on KM is comprehensive. Because my research question addresses how to improve KM practices of SAASI, this literature review will focus primarily on definitions and the major factors that influence KM in positive and negative ways. I will first present literature on definitions and the process of KM. Then, I

will identify key factors that contribute to the success of KM. Finally, I will discuss challenges that prevent the implementation and development of KM.

### **Definitions and the Process of KM**

“Knowledge” and “knowledge management” are complicated concepts. Davenport and Prusak (2000) propose a working definition of “knowledge” which has been cited several times. It is “a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information” (Davenport and Prusak, 2000, p.4). In organizations, knowledge is imbedded in documents, procedures and routines (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). Knowledge can be classified into two categories based on its accessibility: explicit and tacit (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Explicit knowledge is knowledge that has been expressed in forms such as text and diagrams and tacit knowledge is knowledge that cannot be easily expressed such as experience (Anand & Singh, 2011). The SECI model created by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) best explains the transfer between explicit and tacit knowledge. In this model, the process of sharing tacit knowledge involves socialization; the transfer from tacit to explicit knowledge requires externalization; the process of creating new explicit knowledge from existing knowledge results from combination; and the process of transferring explicit into tacit knowledge occurs through internalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Choo, 1998). Knowledge management and knowledge conversion become important for organizational survival (Quinn, Anderson, & Finkelstein, 1996). “Knowledge management” is “the process of creating value from an organization’s intangible assets” (Liebowitz, 1999, p.37). The process contains eight stages: identify, capture, select, store, share, apply, create, and sell (Liebowitz & Beckman, 1998).

### **Factors Contributing to the Success of KM**

In an extensive literature review, factors contributing to the success of implementing KM in an organization have been divided into two groups: environmental and organizational factors (Sedighi & Zand, 2012). Macro environmental elements, such as “legal, economic, political, technological, social, educational, and globalization factors,” affect the implementation of KM (Moffett, McAdam, & Parkinson, 2003; Sedighi & Zand, 2012, p.1). Other environmental elements, such as partnerships and alliances among organizations, affect KM as well (Sedighi & Zand, 2012). Even though these factors cannot be controlled by the organization, they influence internal organizational factors and thus influence KM indirectly (Moffett, McAdam, & Parkinson, 2003).

Organizational factors, which are internally controlled by the organization, influence KM directly (Sedighi & Zand, 2012). First and foremost, having a knowledge-friendly organizational culture is imperative (Davenport, De Long, & Beers, 1998) because organizational culture shapes the behaviors of the organization's members (Zheng, Yang, & Maclean, 2010). Among all dimensions of organizational culture, collaboration is the most prominent characteristic leading to successful KM because knowledge transferring requires interaction (Goh, 2002). Trust is another important dimension of culture as it can increase the propensity of knowledge sharing (Goh, 2002). Second, organizational structures and procedures also contribute to the successful implementation of KM (Sedighi & Zand, 2012). Activities, such as task allocation and coordination, and standards, such as regulations and policies, should be “directed towards the achievement of KM objectives” (Sedighi & Zand, 2012, p.3). Third, people are the heart of an organization (Sedighi & Zand, 2012). Managing people, such as hiring people who can help sustain the knowledge of the organization (Holsapple & Joshi, 2000) and encouraging employees

to create new knowledge (O'Dell & Grayson, 1999), are necessary conditions for successful KM. Fourth, having adequate information technology (IT) and support are also essential for effective KM (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). IT can help facilitate the transfer of knowledge (Goh, 2002). For example, employees can share knowledge easily with each other using video conference without geographic limits (Bolisani & Scarso, 1999). Fifth, financial resources are the foundation of developing and maintaining IT systems which are required as an investment for KM (Wong, 2005). Sixth, having carefully planned strategies for KM is critical in the effectiveness of knowledge transfer (Rhodes, Hung, Lok, Lien, & Wu, 2008). For instance, gaining support and involvement from a senior leadership is an important strategy (Liebowitz, 1999). None of the internal factors can be viewed in isolation, and all of them interact with each other (Sedighi & Zand, 2012).

### **KM Implementation Challenges**

Knowing the factors that can lead to successful KM, organizations still face challenges when they want to implement it. One way to interpret is that if any of the success factors is missing, it would be a challenge for an organization to implement KM. For example, without a collaborative culture, it would be difficult to encourage knowledge sharing (Davenport, De Long, & Beers, 1998).

Chua & Lam (2005) identified four kinds of KM implementation challenges through case studies: technology failure, organizational culture problems, the characteristics of the knowledge being shared, and project management failure. Regarding technology, if the connectivity and usability of the technology is poor, users cannot access the technology they need. Meanwhile, an over-reliance on KM technology can cause an organization to neglect the transmission of tacit knowledge. Additionally, the maintenance cost of KM systems is prohibitively high which

prevents some organizations from developing or maintaining the systems. With respect to organizational culture, if a KM project is used by administrators as a political tool to gain control within the organization, staff members may be reluctant to share knowledge. In addition, if organizational leaders are not committed to KM projects, especially when there are problems with the projects, the project is likely to fail. At the same time, some challenges of KM are determined by the content of knowledge, such as that some knowledge is not in a format that is easily to be shared with others. Finally, project management problems such as limited KM user involvement, lack of staff with expertise to maintain the systems, conflict among stakeholders, poor strategies, and high overall costs can create KM implementation challenges. (Chua & Lam, 2005)

While the literature identifies many different factors which can influence KM in either positive or negative way, SAASI still needs to find out what factors are the most important to it and how those factors can be implemented to accommodate its needs.

### **Methodology**

In order to get comprehensive and detailed information to answer my research question, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with staff from nine student affairs assessment departments at other similar universities. In this section, I will discuss my data collection methods and process, my data analysis strategies, and the strengths and limitations of my research design. Prior to data collection, I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Research Review Committee at Binghamton University (see Appendix A for approval letter).

### **Data Collection**

KM is a complicated concept with various aspects. In order to find specific information about problems SAASI has and the factors influencing KM identified in the literature review, I

conducted semi-structured interviews. To choose my sample, I collaborated with my supervisor at SAASI to identify individuals in other universities. We identified twelve individuals from twelve different universities across the country based on both the results of two existing membership surveys conducted by two associations in the student affairs field and also on my supervisor's knowledge. SAASI is a member of both associations, and my supervisor had access to the two sets of results. She shared the list of universities and contacts with me based on my sample selection criteria. First, we chose individuals only from four year public universities. Second, the individuals are from universities that are similar in size to Binghamton University, with an approximate total enrollment between 15,000 and 19,999 students. Last but not least, the individuals had to be a key staff member in the student affairs assessment department at their university. However, since the data from the membership surveys are not up to date, some departments on our list do not exist anymore, and some individuals did not have available contact information. To supplement the universities identified through the membership surveys, my supervisor provided me a few more contacts based on her knowledge. The contacts she chose are both actively involved in the student affairs field and key staff members in similar departments at similar universities.

My interview questions focused on the management and transfer of explicit and tacit knowledge in the respondents' departments. Some of my questions are open-ended. I also asked some closed-ended questions and then asked interviewees to elaborate on why they provided the answers. In order to minimize potential misunderstandings, I used the term "knowledge management" as little as possible and only toward the end of my interviews after the participants already had a sense of the meaning of this term. I also provided a simple definition to the interviews if they still felt confused about the term at the end of the interviews. I provided

examples in my questions, as well, to show the participants what I was asking for. I believe these strategies helped me to get better information.

For the data collection process, I first emailed the potential participants to let them know that I would be calling to ask them to participate in my study and to set up interview times and dates. After the interviews were scheduled, I called again to collect my data. The interviews took place from March 24 to April 3, 2014, and lasted from 27 to 51 minutes. All the interviews were conducted over the phone. I took notes by hand during the interviews, and the conversations were tape recorded if the participants agreed. I have kept all the raw data confidential. The completed interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze my data, I used thematic coding. Thematic coding involves categorizing responses based on similar themes in order to develop in-depth understanding of the responses. I summarized a few common themes, such as strategies on ensuring the knowledge transition and ways to minimize time spend on data cleaning.

### **Strengths**

The primary strengths of my research are that I used interviews as my data collection tool and that I have a representative sample. Since KM is a very broad concept and can be interpreted in many different ways, interviews allowed me to clarify the specific information I was looking for and to further explain to the participants whatever they did not fully understand about the questions. Interviews also allowed for more flexibility because I was able to ask follow-up questions when I thought I did not get a comprehensive answer. As another strength, since my sample was chosen using feedback from my supervisor and results from membership surveys conducted by two key student affairs associations based on several criteria, it increases the



likelihood that the lessons I learn will be applicable to SAASI at Binghamton University.

Because the goal of my project is to provide recommendations to SAASI, gathering the data from similar departments at similar universities is a key strength of my research.

### **Limitations**

Although my research approach has some important strengths, it also has some limitations. First, I only interviewed ten individuals from nine different departments. Even though the sample departments are similar with SAASI, my sample is small. It is unlikely that the best practices and challenges I got from the small sample would be comprehensive. To address this limitation, I asked very specific and detailed questions in my interview so I can get as much information as I could from the small sample. Second, since KM is a broad and complicated concept, it is unlikely that every participant fully understood the kind of information I was seeking. Although I used several strategies to address this limitation, such as carefully wording my questions, using interviews instead of surveys to give me the chance to explain more in detail, and pretesting my interview questions, the inevitable misunderstandings the participants could have had may influence the validity of my data. Interviewees might have provided the information based on their understanding of the questions but the information might not be what I was looking for. Third, some interviewees might have been uncomfortable sharing with me how their departments are not doing a good job on some aspects of KM. To address this limitation, I emphasized that their interview data would be kept confidential and promised to give a copy of my final capstone paper as an incentive so that they have some recommendations on how to deal with challenges they were facing.

### **Public Administration Core Values**

The public administration program at Binghamton University has incorporated several core values of public service into its courses. The specific values that relate to my research design are sustainability, transparency, and accountability. In terms of sustainability, better managing organizational knowledge will help SAASI with the continuity of its organizational learning and ongoing projects. For example, if the incoming graduate assistants are not familiar with a regular project that SAASI does, they are able to get documents and experience from the previous graduate assistants. Additionally, since SAASI's products are important for decision-making, one of SAASI's functions is to help the Division of Student Affairs be transparent and accountable. Meanwhile, going through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process coordinated by the Human Subjects Research Review Committee at Binghamton University ensures the transparency and accountability of my project. IRB reviews research involving human subjects. All steps of my research have been reported to IRB before I implemented them. In this way, the project is transparent, and I am accountable for adhering to the project plan I submitted to the IRB.

### **Findings**

In order to find out the KM practices used in respondents' departments, I used thematic coding to analyze the data I collected through semi-structured interviews with ten interviewees from nine universities. I interviewed eight interviewees from eight different Universities and two interviewees from the ninth University since the first interviewee from that University referred me to the second interviewee, and both of them provided valuable information. The data analysis reveals five key findings: 1) most student affairs assessment departments have graduate student workers and have varieties of strategies to ensure the transition of organizational knowledge

between previous and incoming graduate student workers and the continuity of ongoing projects; 2) every interviewee indicated that the student affairs assessment department is not the only party dealing with assessment projects in the Division of Student Affairs; 3) some student affairs assessment departments have not only supportive but also administrative functions which means every assessment project within the Division of Student Affairs needs to go through these departments; 4) some departments utilize information systems to reduce the amount of time spent cleaning data; and 5) only a few student affairs assessment departments have standards and processes for documenting their data analysis procedures but most departments recognize the importance of documentation.

**Finding #1: Most student affairs assessment departments have graduate student workers and have varieties of strategies to ensure the transition of organizational knowledge between previous and incoming graduate student workers and the continuity of ongoing projects.**

Among the nine student affairs assessment departments I interviewed, eight departments have either graduate assistants or graduate interns working in the departments. Only one interviewee indicated that even though the Division of Student Affairs in that University has graduate assistants, the department of Student Affairs Assessment has never had any.

Every department which has graduate student workers is developing or has developed some strategies to ensure the transition of organizational knowledge between previous and incoming graduate student workers. The most common strategy they have is to provide orientations or trainings for graduate student workers. Consistent with the SECI model mentioned in literature review, externalization is used to transfer tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. Seven departments indicated that they have formal or informal trainings for graduate student workers

when they first come in to the job. The training may be provided in a variety of ways including: by the universities as part of an overall graduate assistant orientation, by the departments as specific departmental level job training, and by staff members or previous graduate student assistants as informal training. Specifically for assessment related work, sometimes the departments used third-party companies, such as Campus Labs, to provide trainings on specific techniques. Another common strategy seven departments use is to provide different kinds of documents to incoming graduate student workers so that they can review the documents as resources. These documents included graduate students' handbooks, manuals, previous assessment reports, and sample data and free software packages for them to practice. Consistent with the internalization and combination aspects of SECI model, this strategy transfers explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge and encourages the creation of new explicit knowledge from existing explicit knowledge. Having the outgoing and incoming graduate assistants working together and the incoming graduate assistants shadowing the outgoing graduate assistants for certain time is also a popular strategy. Three interviewees from three departments indicated that they use this strategy. Consistent with the SECI model, this strategy is an example of socialization where tacit knowledge is shared. However, not every department is able to utilize this strategy even though they consider it to be a good one because of financial and scheduling reasons. For example, one interviewee commented, "It's budget, budget, and budget. We don't have money to bring incoming graduate assistants before academic year starts. It's semester by semester." This finding is consistent with one of the success factors, adequate financial resources, identified in the literature review.

To ensure the continuity of ongoing projects given the inevitable turnover of student workers, different strategies mentioned in the interviews include: 1) assigning only projects that

have relatively fixed durations and can possibly be completed within the students' tenures so there is no need for knowledge transfer; 2) ensuring that more than one student worker will not be leaving at the same time so that knowledge could be transferred by the ones who will not be leaving to the incoming student workers; 3) hiring students who can work at least for a certain period of time such as doctoral students who stay at the University for longer period than master students so the knowledge transfer might not need to happen too often; and 4) relying on professional staff members to pick up the assigned projects when a student worker has to leave so the knowledge could be transferred to someone who stays longer in the department. Figure 1 details the number of departments that mentioned these strategies in the interviews. They either have implemented or are implementing the strategies.

	Strategy #1	Strategy #2	Strategy #3	Strategy #4
# of departments using strategy	2	4	1	1

*Table 1: Number of departments that have implemented or are implementing each strategy for ensuring the continuity of ongoing projects.*

**Finding #2: Every interviewee indicated that the student affairs assessment department is not the only party dealing with assessment projects in the Division of Student Affairs.**

Typically, the student affairs assessment department is within the Division of Student Affairs. Six interviewees from six departments indicated that they have at least one committee in their division which deals with assessment related issues. These committees consist of people from different departments within the division who has expertise or interests in assessment and help carry out the projects. The committees oversee all the assessment projects within the Division of Student Affairs. Having a committee structure provides staff members from different departments with opportunities to communicate formally and informally with each other. While

six interviewees from six departments indicated that the data they received is usually had already been cleaned, in another word, is already in useable format, the common theme they came up is “communication.” These interviewees believed that one reason their departments generally received clean data was because of the communication that was taking place on the committees. One interviewee mentioned: “We have very close communication...The data we received always came to us in a clean format...The assessment committee meet monthly and has a monthly update.”

Meanwhile, all nine departments indicated that some other departments in the Division of Student Affairs, such as the residential life department, have assessment individuals who are responsible for conducting their own assessment projects. Six interviewees from six departments mentioned that one important component of the student affairs assessment department's job is to provide assessment trainings and need-based education for those individuals to help them become more self-sufficient. The trainings and education are used to transfer assessment related knowledge from student affairs assessment staff members to staff members in other departments. In this way, the student affairs assessment department may not necessarily receive data from other departments since they would be able to do the majority of assessment work on their own. This finding is consistent with a success factor identified in the literature review: people.

Educating staff members would be beneficial for overall KM implementation.

**Finding #3: Some student affairs assessment departments have not only supportive but also administrative functions which means every assessment project within the Division of Student Affairs needs to go through these departments.**

In terms of organizational functions, two general types of functions were identified: administrative and supportive functions. Every assessment department has a supportive role in

helping other departments in the division to become more self-sufficient in conducting their own assessments. Six departments I interviewed played an administrative role in campus assessment as well. For example, one interviewee works in the Vice President's office and has a higher level position than others in the division: "I am the one person in the division who is responsible for coordinating assessment activities across the division. The directors of each department make sure the assessment is happening and they report up to me." As another example, even though another interviewee did not have a formal administrative role, it was the division's expectation that every assessment project in the division should go through this person.

Having a "coordinating hub" helps the entire division to centralize information and enhance effectiveness. For example, two interviewees mentioned one challenge they face is that the students are being over-surveyed. Different departments did not collaborate, and they were asking students similar questions as part of different projects. This challenge can be effectively addressed by utilizing the administrative role of the student affairs assessment departments. If every assessment project needs to go through the "coordinating hub," similar surveys can be combined, facilitating collaboration between different departments. This finding is consistent with a success factor identified in the literature review: appropriate organizational structures.

**Finding #4: Some departments utilize information systems to reduce the amount of time spent cleaning data.**

Three interviewees from three departments indicated that they do not necessarily receive data from other departments, but usually have access to data collected by the information systems such as Survey Monkey and Campus Labs so that the data is relatively clean. For example one interviewee commented:

I download datasets from Campus Labs...In some cases I am involved in getting the data to them (other departments within the Division), or passing data to the survey, or integrating data...Sometimes the data goes through me to them rather than up to me from them.

This finding is consistent with a success factor, adequate information technology, identified in the literature review.

**Finding #5: Only a few student affairs assessment departments have standards and processes for documenting their data analysis procedures but most departments recognize the importance of documentation.**

Among all the interviewees, only one person stated that he documents the data processes in detailed steps and he is the only person who keeps detailed documentation in the department. An interviewee mentioned that he had never thought about documentation before and had only begun recognizing the importance of documentation from my interview. Since the departments and staff members may be new or they may be the only people who do assessment in their departments or divisions, they do not need to share the processes they use with others and have never been asked for the procedures they used to produce their results. However, seven departments I interviewed indicated the importance of documentation. In the words of one interviewee, "For assessment, it is ideal to have a report that document in detailed ways of procedures you have done...It is a clear version for internal use...Documentation meets the needs of institutional memory." This finding is consistent with the success factor of appropriate organizational procedures identified in the literature review.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, I am making the following recommendations to help SAASI at Binghamton University better manage their organizational knowledge: 1) keep utilizing existing strategies to ensure the transition of knowledge between outgoing and incoming student workers



and the continuity of ongoing projects; 2) build the assessment capacities of other departments within the division by offering regular trainings and need-based education; and 3) organize an assessment committee for the division that consists of individuals from different departments who are interested in or capable of conducting assessment projects.

**Recommendation #1: Keep utilizing existing strategies to ensure the transition of knowledge between outgoing and incoming student workers and the continuity of ongoing projects.**

According to Finding #1, a variety of strategies can be used to ensure the transition of knowledge between outgoing graduate assistants and incoming graduate assistants and to ensure the continuity of ongoing projects. As mentioned in my methodology section, one core public service value is sustainability. Ensuring the transition of knowledge is a way to ensure the department's sustainability. SAASI has already implemented some of the strategies and is working diligently on improving its ability to ensure the transition of knowledge. Even though there currently are no formal trainings and orientations, different types of informal trainings help new incoming graduate assistants to adapt to the working environment and to understand their assignments. For example, the Director of the department supervises the graduate assistants directly and provides information whenever needed. As another example, SAASI provides information on available webinars that helps graduate assistants to learn more about the area of student affairs assessment. Campus Labs, an information company which referenced a few times in the findings section, has a contract with SAASI and provides trainings on various techniques to staff members as well. SAASI also has a graduate assistant manual which details the information of different IT systems of BU campus and other job-related information. Since SAASI uses a shared drive, everyone in the department has access to the previous reports and all

other documents. During every summer, SAASI offered outgoing graduate assistants and incoming graduate assistants the opportunities to work together so that they are able to share some work-related knowledge. However, because of the different schedules the graduate assistants have, this plan does not always work out. Meanwhile, SAASI does a good job ensuring the continuity of ongoing projects. Every strategy that has been mentioned in the interviews for ensuring the continuity of ongoing projects has been implemented by SAASI already.

Besides continuing to use these strategies, SAASI can consider providing sample data and free versions of software packages for graduate assistants to practice with before they start working on any project. Since data analysis is a primary assignment graduate assistants have, this strategy may be helpful.

**Recommendation #2: Build the assessment capacities of other departments within the division by offering regular trainings and need-based education.**

According to Finding #2, six interviewees from six departments mentioned that their departments provide assessment trainings and need-based education for individuals in other departments who are conducting assessments to help them become more self-sufficient. In this way, tacit knowledge can be transferred into explicit knowledge and be shared with the larger group. Meanwhile, SAASI would avoid receiving unclean data since other departments would be able to do more data cleaning and data analysis on themselves.

Currently SAASI is doing a number of projects for other departments but is not necessarily helping them to do the projects on their own. One thing to consider is to provide trainings on a regular basis for assessment contacts in those departments to improve their capacities to conduct their own projects.

**Recommendation #3: Organize an assessment committee for the division that consists of individuals from different departments who are interested in or capable of conducting assessment projects.**

As mentioned in Finding #2, using a committee structure would provide both formal and informal opportunities for different departments to communicate with each other. With regular communications, SAASI would reduce the chance of receiving unclear data. At the same time, communication is an effective way to bridge knowledge gaps and to cultivate collaborations. For example, with regular communication, different departments doing assessments can avoid over-surveying the students. As another example, communication could make it easier for staff members in the student affairs field who do not have strong backgrounds in statistics to understand assessment results.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of my interviews, SAASI now has the relevant information about how other Student Affairs Assessment departments manage their organizational knowledge. Even though not much information has been identified on how to standardize the documentation procedures, very valuable information on other aspects of KM has been provided. SAASI at Binghamton University can use the findings and recommendations that emerged from my research to identify best practices. Other Student Affairs Assessment departments which face similar challenges can also use information from this report.

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## Appendix A

Date: March 11, 2014

To: Ximeng Chen, CCPA

From: Anne M. Casella, CIP Administrator

Human Subjects Research Review Committee

Subject: Human Subjects Research Approval

Protocol Number: 3232-14

Protocol title: Improving SAASI's knowledge management practice

Your project identified above was reviewed by the HSRRC and has received an Exempt approval pursuant to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) .

An exempt status signifies that you will not be required to submit a Continuing Review application as long as your project involving human subjects remains unchanged. If your project undergoes any changes these changes must be reported to our office prior to implementation.

Please complete the modification form found at the following link:

[http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS\\_Docs.php](http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS_Docs.php)

Principal Investigators or any individual involved in the research must report any problems involving the conduct of the study or subject participation. Any problems involving recruitment and consent processes or any deviations from the approved protocol should be reported in writing within five (5) business days as outlined in Binghamton University, Human Subjects Research Review Office, Policy and Procedures IX.F.1 Unanticipated Problems/adverse events/complaints. We require that the Unanticipated Problems/adverse events/complaints form be submitted to our office, found at the following link:

[http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS\\_Docs.php](http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS_Docs.php)

University policy requires you to maintain as a part of your records, any documents pertaining to the use of human subjects in your research. This includes any information or materials conveyed to, and received from, the subjects, as well as any executed consent forms, data and analysis results. These records must be maintained for at least six years after project completion or termination. If this is a funded project, you should be aware that these records are subject to inspection and review by authorized representative of the University, State and Federal governments.

Please notify this office when your project is complete by completing and forwarding to our office the Protocol closure form found at the following link:

[http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS\\_Docs.php](http://research.binghamton.edu/Compliance/humansubjects/COEUS_Docs.php) Upon notification we will close the above referenced file. Any reactivation of the project will require a new application.

This documentation is being provided to you via email. A hard copy will not be mailed unless you request us to do so.

Thank you for your cooperation, I wish you success in your research, and please do not hesitate to contact our office if you have any questions or require further assistance.

cc: file

Kristina Lambright

Diane Bulizak, Secretary

Human Subjects Research Review Office

Biotechnology Building, Room 2205

Binghamton University

85 Murray Hill Rd.

Vestal, NY 13850

[dbulizak@binghamton.edu](mailto:dbulizak@binghamton.edu)

Telephone: (607) 777-3818

Fax: (607) 777-5025



## Appendix B Interview Protocol

1. How many people work in your office? Specifically, how many full-time equivalents, student workers/interns/volunteers?  
Viewing them as a group, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: they are willing to share their work-related knowledge with one another? Why did you provide that answer?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neutral
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
  
2. Do you have graduate research assistants/graduate assistants/graduate interns working in your office? If yes, what fields are the GAs from? What kind of tasks do you assign to the GAs?
  
3. How long does a GA serve in your office? Do you have frequent GA turnovers? If yes, how do you ensure the continuity of ongoing projects? What procedures do you use so that previous GAs share their job-related experience and expertise with incoming GAs?
  
4. To what extent do you have standards and processes for documenting your data analysis procedures?
  - Very much
  - Somewhat
  - Not at allFor example, if your department repeats the same project, to what extent do you document the steps? How do you document them? How do you share that with someone who is going to do that project again?
  
5. To what extent do different staff members in your office have different specialized skills and knowledge?
  - Very much
  - Somewhat
  - Not at allFor example, some student workers may know more about statistics and less about the university history than some professional staff. How do you deal with those situations?
  
6. How often do you receive data from other departments?
  - Frequently
  - Often
  - Sometimes

- Never

To what extent does it come to you in a usable format that does not require a significant level of effort to reformat it for your purposes? What strategies do you use to minimize the time you must spend cleaning data? For example, do you meet with the department before to make sure you are on the same page?

7. Form working at X university, you have developed relationships and a sense of how things work. How do you share that information with others in your department?
8. What are the strengths of your knowledge management practice?
9. What are the challenges you experienced related to knowledge management practice?