



Strategies for Staying Current in Student Affairs

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Strategies for Staying Current

- I use a multi-prong approach. I scan often to see what catches my eye, what may be relevant to what is happening in the moment or what we are planning for in the future... On Twitter, I follow several policy centers and news outlets (i.e., the Chronicle) to engage in a broader conversation about higher education. I also follow and engage in dialogue using the #sachat, #WLSalt and #highered hashtag. If I am too busy to read something in the moment, I place it in my "to read" stack on my desk so I don't lose it or forget about it. Connecting with professionals, whether on a local, state or national level, and engaging them on topics is a great way to do this.
- Find several things you do consistently and are reasonably likely to continue. On my list are the following: review the Chronicle of Higher Education on a regular basis (I like the hard copy, but I now also get the daily electronic version and try to open it and consider the headlines several times a week); and find 1 or 2 other sources you like that have some way to get higher education/education related materials (Higher Ed.com; NY Times; Washington Post; etc).
- Let others know that you are always interested in knowing (I have a staff member who directs things to me, and my partner sends things he reads regularly). Build a network – you can't read it all yourself.
- I stay current in the field by staying active in professional organizations, such as NASPA, by serving and volunteering for the organization, attending regional and national conferences, reading journals and e-newsletters, as well as taking advantage of regional professional development opportunities.

- Listen when your colleagues are discussing issues, challenges, trends in their fields, etc. Even if the conversation may not directly apply to your position, it's important to know what's happening with students throughout higher education. This can add to your general understanding of the profession and the needs of students, including how they're changing.
- I sign up for multiple email subscriptions. I am currently subscribed to InsideHigherEd.com, Academic Impressions, the Chronicle, and HigherEdJobs.com. For TRiO programs (my area of focus), I'm currently subscribed to the AZ Chapter of WESTOP, Westop.org, and also to the Council for Opportunity Education. Also, I try to attend any local professional development opportunities for networking and growth. I've also attended at least one annual conference per year.
- Besides the obvious – e.g., reading the Chronicle, attending conferences, etc. – it's important to me to know the new ways students are learning... whether its webinars, tests where the students text in their answers, using I-clicker, Prezi, podcasts, etc. This helps me understand their classroom experience a little better and be able to more effectively communicate with them about their academic progress. I find out about these methods by connecting with faculty.
- Share articles of interest with your colleagues – this will lead to them sharing information with you. If I come across something in my [graduate] program at UCLA that I think my colleagues may find interesting, I send it to them electronically with a little note to let them know I thought they might benefit from it. This has resulted in many of my peers sharing articles and press releases with me on topics I would never have come across but need to be aware of. It's amazing how much people appreciate being kept in the loop.
- It's a constant struggle to stay current, but I do my best by attending conferences (primarily), skimming the Chronicle of Higher Ed, opening NASPA e-mails and gleaning highlights, and reading some professional literature – although [as I've progressed in my career] it has become harder and harder to devote time to this. Another strategy is to talk with colleagues.
- I always ask people what they're reading and... which newsletters/periodicals they find most useful. I never have enough time to keep up on all the reading, so finding out what people find useful (including information outside of student affairs) has helped me focus and be strategic in what I am willing to pay for. I also find that when I need information – because I am working on an issue – it is easy to research.
- I subscribe to Chronicle of Higher Education; read the NASPA Leadership Exchange; try to attend a regional or national student affairs conference once a year (either large orgs. such as ACPA or NASPA or specialty organizations such as NACADA, NACE, ASCA, etc.).
- I have a list of counterparts (people whose job is similar to mine) at “like” campuses and those we benchmark with, who I frequently e-mail or call to ask about trends, issues, concerns, or how they might be addressing a certain topic on their campus... When you can have such a list to draw from, it's easier to do any necessary research.
- My strategies include: (1) involvement in NASPA in order to have access to information, research, and mentors and leaders beyond [my] campus; (2) attending the regional and national NASPA and NODA conference, as budget allows; and (3) presenting at conferences – if you're going to present to your peers, you need to know what you're talking about and that means staying current.

- There are a couple of strategies I use for keeping current in both my individual specialty and within the broader context of student affairs. First, of course, is to join my professional association – I am a member of Association of Student Conduct Administrators, and through that I receive newsletters and weekly postings. I particularly like the discussion board, as many timely and thought-provoking topics come through this way. I am also a member of both NASPA and ACPA. I enjoy the interactions I have with my NASPA colleagues and am involved with the NASPA region.
- I find a few publications particularly valuable. I really like About Campus... as it has thought-provoking articles, often around a theme... Second, I really like Student Affairs Leader, which is a Magna Publication. I find this to be very useful in summing up happenings that I may not be aware of.
- My most effective way for staying current is attending the NASPA national conference. It's my most efficient way of gathering a lot of perspective and resources on our profession. On a less consistent but perhaps more effective basis, being involved in planning a conference has always been a significant way to stay current. The conversations that lead to the creation of a theme, major speakers, program, etc., are all enlightening when it comes to understanding where we are as a profession. Lastly, the reading I do centers around The Chronicle and magazine publications from NASPA, AAC&U, and ACPA.
- I definitely keep current through my involvement with NASPA – regionally and nationally. Attending and presenting at conferences is a big way to get cutting edge information on best practices and new trends. I actively participate in NASPA's Knowledge Communities and seek out other professionals in the field through my NASPA networking. I read the Chronicle online everyday as well as the paper version when it gets routed to my office. I'm also on several daily list-serves that generate an e-mail with brief articles about current issues. I read the NASPA and ACPA Journals, as well as order new books out of the Jossey-Bass and Stylus publications. Because I teach a SAHE course, I remain current both through my own research, as well as reading all the students' research papers.
- At my institution, I coordinate the Professional Development Series within the division of student affairs, so we have bi-weekly professional development sessions on everything from "How to Maximize your PowerPoint Presentations" to "Question, Persuade, Refer: Suicide Intervention Strategies." We also have a Staff Training and Development Day each semester (which is basically a mini-conference for student affairs staff), a fall Diversity Conference for the university, and a winter break Professional Development Institute for the university.
- From a supervisory standpoint, I ask [my staff] a couple of times a month what they're reading professionally or doing to pursue a professional interest. Personally, I think it's important to spend a few minutes every week keeping up on current events in higher ed and I check InsideHigherEd.com several times a week, and try to set aside time to go through the Chronicle. Professional journals are obviously a good resource as well. I keep an Outlook inbox folder called 'to be read' and I try to schedule time, typically on a Friday afternoon, to go through the folder.
- Strategies that work for me include... NASPA and ACPA emails; conversations with colleagues-locally and nationally; listening to students-grad and undergrad; [attending] local, regional and national conferences; [reading] new books, journals etc.; and [challenging myself to] learn new skills
- I attempt to stay abreast of the issues by reading the Chronicle of Higher Education and the electronic newsletters that NASPA sends out. I also spend a lot of time e-mailing and talking with colleagues about what's happening on their campuses.

- Read newspapers, read journals and publications from professional associations... not just [your functional area], but student learning, world news, pop culture, alcohol and drugs, mental health, etc.
- Personally, I listen to the Morning Edition on NPR every day. Do I love it? Heck no, but I can tell I'm more well-versed with my faculty colleagues than some of my counterparts. We all know Komives, student development theory, etc, but can we speak to the crisis taking place in the gulf coast or the legislation in Arizona?
- I am currently a [PhD] student so that really helps me stay current. When not in school, I: (1) attend webinars on everything and anything from crisis response and campus preparedness to sexual assault to FERPA to you name it! (2) attend regional conferences (whether NASPA/ACPA/ACUHO-I/ ACUI/NACA sponsored or drive-ins, etc); (3) present at or attend conferences outside my "norm;" (4) participate in regional communities through NASPA or ACPA; (5) sit on advisory boards; (6) READ the Chronicle and other journals – JCSJ, Women in Higher Ed, etc; (7) ask to be on listservs that peak [my] interest; and (8) schedule meetings with colleagues at other institutions in similar positions.
- Talk to colleagues in the field – start with colleagues in the region, and find out what issues they deal with. Look at what [student affairs] graduate programs are teaching. Take a class, or audit a class, or just attend a class with graduate students in the field. Find out [who is] speaking at conferences, their expertise and research topics. Ask colleagues what they read, what they think the current issues are.
- On a day-to-day basis, I can't find the time to read or research outside of regular responsibilities as much as I would like. But, knowing what is happening beyond my campus is definitely important in understanding how higher education and student affairs are currently being impacted by the larger political, economic and social forces. It [has also been] beneficial to explore and understand how other institutions are responding to similar issues that my institution is currently facing, such as increasing enrollment, budget cuts, and the economic climate. I don't think it's possible to work in higher education and not pay attention to current events.
- Each morning I check my top websites: Inside Higher Ed and the Chronicle. Getting into this routine has helped ease me into each day, and I usually pair it with the morning cup of coffee. We also tend to share news articles within our department and discuss them through email, which is good encouragement. Also, talking with colleagues from other schools, attending interesting conference sessions, and watching news programs related to higher ed (e.g., the recent Frontline special on for-profit institutions) help.
- Through my office I have sought out opportunities and have been able to attend both regional and national ACUI conferences. I also read the ACUI Bulletin when it comes across my desk and seek out and communicate with the professional networks I am able to build. Within [my] office, it is more important to stay current on social and political issues so I find myself spending a lot of time keeping up with news, skimming Facebook, talking world events with my co-workers, etc. Because I am on such a large campus with such an array of professional interests I find myself reaching out to like minded people when I come across them. Sometimes through campus projects but more often than not it is through coffees, drinks, lunches, etc. I also find that I raise my hand and sign up to be a part of programs that interest me and that are more beacons or driving forces within student affairs. For example, there is an interest in division wide assessment project within Student Life at UW. When someone asked if I had an interest in being a part of it I raised my hand and said yes. I think there is a lot of personal responsibility to stay engaged and up to date. It is not going to be handed to you.

- For convenience, I subscribe to daily e-mails from the NY Times (and make sure to read the Education page) and Inside HigherEd. This helps me to actually get a little reading in each morning when I'm checking/writing e-mail. Otherwise, I would easily let my reading slip. Of course, the Chronicle is indispensable and I usually get the copy that's floating around the Admissions office or I go into the library's web site to get access to the online version. For international stuff, I get weekly emails from NAFSA which usually has lots of links to Chronicle and Inside HigherEd articles, among others, that pertain to international [trends and issues].
- I make sure and keep up with our professional association and their publications (NODA). I also spend a lot of time talking with peers and finding out what trends they are seeing either in person here at [my institution] or what national things they are hearing about from their peers. For example, admissions is a huge partner, so I spend a lot of time discussing what they are seeing nationally. I also constantly evaluate and look at our programs, so we can be sure and answer the "why" in why we do things a certain way. Having this mindset constantly forces to me to look for the most recent trends, research etc. to see if there is a way to improve our programs, services, strategies, etc.
- The best way for me to stay current is to read the daily emails I receive from HigherEd.com, the Chronicle of Higher Ed, and the NY Times. Additionally, I am a part of two listserves – one for disAbilities and another for veterans issues. Listserves are a blessing and a curse. I find that I have to sift through a lot of emails but it is always nice to know other institutions are dealing with the same issues.
- The Chronicle is one of my mainstays as well as various theme-specific books... As student affairs professionals we are in a constant sprint from the first day of class until the last day so I have limited time to devote to staying current. Besides the Chronicle and books relevant to my specific job I also try and go to as many professional conferences as possible (and as my budget will allow)... Another method I use is to peruse other institutions via their websites. If I come across a program or something interesting I will pick up the phone and call the contact person and pick their brain. I also have joined several listserves that are very specific to certain areas I am working in.
- I sign up to review program proposals for a conference at least every other year or so. Even if I can't go, I at least get to see what is being presented and can follow up with folks if interested.