

College Union Professionals: 100 Years of Reflection Teddi Gallagher & Lillian Zamecnik

College union organizations encompass a wide variety of personnel. The functions of a college union are inclusive of facility maintenance, student programming, hotel management, conference services, scheduling, retail management, and outdoor adventures, just to name a few. The unique nature of the college union organization is an ever evolving community that is inclusive; comprises a variety of different skills, focus, and educational preparation. However, what has remained consistent is the college union's role in serving as a gathering place for the campus and creating conditions for student learning and engagement. This chapter will explore the evolution of the college union professional and provide a picture of the complex nature of these organizations on today's college campus.

At the beginning, the total administration of the higher education experience was left to faculty (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). The most basic foundations of student affairs began during the period between 1780-1820, when university staff began to oversee the management and administration of the dormitories, discipline, and student welfare (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). The realm of students affairs work continued to develop with the growth of American colleges and universities. The years between 1900 and 1950 saw the evolution of student affairs into a profession with the creation of the 1937 and 1949 *Student Personnel Point of View* documents and many professional associations. The basis of the profession is rooted in the concept of higher education developing well-rounded, balanced citizens (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). Therefore, student affairs professionals are concerned with the holistic development of college students and student learning taking place outside of traditional academic spaces (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). As American higher education progressed, the number and variety of student services offered increased with institutional enrollment and the diversification of the student

body. Eventually the administration of these services along with the development of students became too much for deans of students and more specialized professionals were required to manage the breadth of student life on the college campus (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

The Association of College Unions International was founded in 1914, making it one of the oldest student affairs professional associations in the country and indicating the college union as an important subset of the college administration and student affairs profession (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). Originally, the union was managed by one professional along with assistance from undergraduate students, but through the years the college union operation has become increasingly complex. Today, the college union is responsible for successfully combining an array of functions into one building. It provides space for many necessary student services as well as different activities including meetings, dining, programs, and large events. In addition, it is also the responsibility of the union to provide a place on campus for students, faculty, and staff to socialize

and interact in an informal setting (Knell & Latta, 2006). In order for the college union to be successful in carrying out its functions, it requires a diverse group of professionals in various areas of expertise to work together towards a common goal.

For this reason, college union organizations encompass a wide variety of personnel. The functions of a college union include; administration and finance, facility maintenance and operations, student activities and programming, hotel and bookstore management, dining, and conference services, just to name a few. The unique nature of the college union organization requires a staff that is inclusive of a variety of different skills, focus, and educational preparation. These functions, blended with the abilities of the staff, enable the college union to serve as a gathering place for the campus and to create conditions for student learning and engagement. This chapter will explore the evolution of the college union professional and provide a picture of the complex nature of these organizations on today's college campus.

The Beginnings and Growth of the Union Professional Idea

In the beginning at Oxford in 1815, the student union was envisioned, created, and managed by the students themselves oftentimes in direct conflict with the desires and edicts of university administrators. The Oxford University Student Union was truly a union in the traditional sense of the word. It was created to represent students in decision-making, the national higher education policy debate, and provide services for students. While the union was created as

a student organization, they built a facility in 1857 as a central location used to meet and it became known as the union (Butts, 1971). The union idea jumped the pond from England to the United States in the late 1800s and continued the Cambridge-Oxford pattern prevalent in American higher education (Thelin, 2004). At this time, also similar to the experiences in England, the conflicts between students and administrators regarding the priorities of collegiate life and student activities created a tense coexistence.

Administrators and students struggled over the existence of student organizations and vied for control when it became clear student organizations would never disappear from the landscape of higher education (Thelin, 2004). Though it originated in England, the student union idea in each nation took different paths. Today, the majority of student unions in England, such as those at Cambridge and Oxford, have remained "for students, by students" with elected student officers to provide a variety of services and programming. Alternatively, the American student union moved away from its student governance roots and became professionally staffed with the focus on union facilities and formalization of student affairs in the United States (Thelin, 2004).

By the turn of the century, the student affairs profession was building its foundations and professionals were slowly beginning to embrace the value of extracurricular activities as tools for student learning. In addition, extracurricular activities managed by professionals were an emerging solution to address the student organizations at the time which were fraught with

deliberate disobedience and overindulgence (Thelin, 2004). Student union organizations provided administrators with a structured alternative to secret societies and eating clubs and allowed them to exert some control over the patterns of student life and interactions (Thelin, 2004). The union's purpose was to bring members of the university community together to further scholarship through more informal means. In 1904, President Charles Van Hise of the University of Wisconsin called for a union to produce scholars and make men through the communal life of instructors and students in work, play, and social relations (Butts, 1971). In 1909, President Woodrow Wilson recommended reorganization of college life to combine instruction and co-curricular activities in order to create a community of scholars and movement away from the teachers' and governors' sole devotion to instruction (Butts, 1971). According to Thelin (2004), "the student union movement was a truly nationwide phenomenon" (p.193) and elaborate unions were constructed to reduce the separation between students and provide a place for commuter students. For these reasons, the union idea took root in American higher education and university presidents, governance boards, and deans of students began supporting the establishment of student union organizations and proposing the construction of facilities to house these activities in order to improve education and provide mitigated extracurricular opportunities. However, the dean of students remained the sole student affairs practitioner on campus and the student union became their

responsibility, which was primarily delegated to the student union officers.

By 1914, students involved in union activities believed an association was needed to support student union organizations and the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) was established (Association of College Unions International, 2009). At the beginning, ACUI meetings were by and for the students, similar to the unions in Great Britain. However, in the opening address of the 10th Annual Conference of the ACUI in 1929, the orator spoke about the development of university departments dedicated to deal with students' hours outside of classroom and teach life skills and culture (Butts, 1971). This conversation was occurring throughout the field of student affairs and would eventually lead to the 1937 *Student Personnel Point of View*. The 1929 address also called for a combination of student self-governance and staff aid to make unions a viable and successful aspect of the university. It was said "no sizable self-governing body operates successfully without a full-time administrative branch; we should not expect more of students...we look to the student to provide policies and purposes and inspiration...but we also provide a good many full-time staff members to see that what the student governors have asked for is carried through" (Butts, 1971, p.24). For students, this would mean more regulation and university input into the college union and the possible loss of control, but less responsibility for daily operations. The early iterations of the union professional role were focused primarily on the operation of the union facility versus the programming and activities that occurred inside of it. The role of union professionals was to manage the

building and its various operations in order to facilitate a healthy and developmental student experience. As of 1930, professional members of ACUI outnumbered student members for the first time and the union profession continued to develop and grow in American higher education (Association of College Unions International, 2009).

The literature and publications about college unions in the 1940s and 1950s are full of discussion and definitions of the purpose of unions and union professionals in higher education. Professionals engaged in critical assessment of the field in order to create a purpose and vision for the future, which resulted in ACUI's adoption of a formal statement of purpose called *The Role of the College Union* in 1956 (Butts, 1971). As part of this critical assessment, the *State of the College Union* at ACUI conferences during this time focused on the positives and negatives of leadership in college unions. Administrators noted negatively the treatment of college unions as solely auxiliary enterprises and bookkeeping operations and called for more attention to the educational program and goals of the union (Butts, 1971). This was a much different tune from twenty years earlier. In addition, union professionals praised the "rare" higher level administrators who cared about the needs of students and the mental health of union directors and hired large assistant staffs for the union (Butts, 1971). The issues discussed at these conferences demonstrate the predominant view of unions as business operations and the serious issues of understaffing. Administrators came together to brainstorm strategies for strengthening the educational program while resolving personnel shortages.

They recommended involving student volunteers and student employees to teach leadership and career skills as well as bear some of the workload in the union.

The understaffing trend continued through the 1950s as illustrated by the *State of the Union 1961* address at the annual ACUI conference. Union professionals continued to bemoan the lack of support from institutions to hire more staff members and the keynote described the attendees as the lucky ones because many professionals could not take time from work because there would be no one left to run the union (Butts, 1971). After World War II and the increase in university enrollment, the college union was called on to be more and meet new and increasing student demands. To accommodate these changes a typical union was open an average of 16 hours per day, seven days a week and the busiest times were in the evenings and on the weekends (Butts, 1971). It quickly became evident that more staff was required in college unions to be able to offer these operational hours without exhausting the traditional, sole union director. Therefore, in the years after 1950, the union profession grew to include a variety of new administrative roles to relieve the pressure on the union director and continue growing the college union as an integral part of student learning in higher education.

Professional Roles in the College Union

Hart House, at the University of Toronto, was opened in 1919 as a gathering place for the entire university and alumni communities rather than only students. It was decided the building

would be managed by the Warden, the chief administrative officer, who would be a professional staff member (Butts, 1971). This is the first mention of specifically a college union professional, but as the student affairs profession continued to develop, the union profession did as well.

Union directors became the primary union professional staff members and struggled with the enormous amount of responsibilities they were expected to manage alone. They managed the union facilities, advised union boards and student governance, worked with other departments to train student leaders and employees, and guide students in purposeful educational and leisure activities. In addition, they managed the business functions of the building, which alone became full-time work for one or more individuals. In an editorial for 1937 *The Bulletin*, a union director expounds on the need for a larger staff to manage the union because it was no longer a “one-man job”. From 1920-1940, union operations and physical plants expanded tremendously and the traditional organization could no longer support the new opportunities and challenges. The union director writes, “...if unions are to do what they want to do and if the directors are to lead reasonably normal lives, the building must be manned by a larger supervisory staff” (Butts, 1971, p. 39). This push on the part of the overburdened union directors led to the creation of additional professional staff positions to aid in specific functions of the union enterprise.

As new professional positions were added, the role of the union director was discussed and outlined in a

conversation at the ACU conference in 1959, to clarify its evolving role. The union directors present at the conference listed the following as the main functions of the position at that time (Butts, 1971):

- To provide continuity, to preserve goals and traditions, as well as create new ones.
- To achieve understanding of the union by the administration and faculty.
- To first convince the administration of the need for adequate staff and professional status, and then to select and train other union professionals to build a competent, perceptive staff.
- He should take his place among other department heads and faculty because the union and its importance are gauged in many ways by the status of its staff.
- He should be coordinator of the total union enterprise, not just part.
- He should stay close to the student union board in order to be knowledgeable of student interests and attitudes and keep students at the center of union decisions.
- He should be a leader of student and educational life on campus and not simply the manager of a building.

Today, the college union profession has evolved to include many different positions in areas such as union administration and finance, auxiliary services, campus life and programming, and facilities and operations. Although each college union is unique, ACUI has provided sample job descriptions for several common positions at college

unions within these areas, which include the primary responsibilities for each position, special qualifications, required education, and experience, as well as the core competencies associated with each position. While each union has its own specific needs, these sample descriptions are helpful in developing individual positions and hiring staff to fill them. They are also useful to those outside the field to understand the work of professionals in these positions (ACUI Sample Job Descriptions, 2012).

Union Administration, Finance, and Management

Union administration, finance, and management include union leadership and administration, heads of business affairs, marketing, human resources and technology related areas (ACUI Sample Job Descriptions, 2012). These individuals are responsible for providing vision and leadership to the union in areas such as the creation of union policies and procedures, use of technology, and marketing of programs and services. In order for union administrators to be effective, they must continually gain and develop new knowledge and skills, understand current issues affecting college unions, and assess their organization in comparison to peer institutions (Knell & Latta, 2006). Because unions are often asked to fulfill many roles on a limited budget, successful union administrators know how to maximize human and fiscal resources. They develop new and creative ways to gain additional revenue, employ effective cost-cutting strategies, and provide union staff with supplementary training and professional development opportunities to expand their current skill-set. They are also aware of governance issues and work to

develop close relationships with students, faculty, and staff who make up union governing boards (Knell & Latta, 2006).

The union director remains a key member of the administrative team. Based on the current ACUI Sample Job Description for the director of the college union (2013), it appears that the role of the union director has remained relatively unchanged since the 1959 ACUI conference when the role was outlined. Union directors today are still responsible for providing vision and oversight to the union facility and its staff, as well as serving as an ambassador to others in the campus community. They are also still expected to coordinate the total union enterprise, not just specific functional areas. According to the ACUI Sample Job Description (2013), direct supervision of individual functional areas should be assigned to associate and assistant directors. While this allows the director to focus on the overarching mission, vision, and goals of the union, it can also potentially lead to functional silos. For this reason, union directors should be intentional in encouraging communication and collaboration among union professionals in order to avoid returning any particular area back to the “one man job” mentality of past union professionals.

Although the primary responsibilities of union directors have stayed relatively constant, there seems to be a greater emphasis on the qualifications for the position. In addition to management experience, contemporary union directors are expected to have a thorough understanding of student development and leadership theories, ability to

develop student learning outcomes, and an appreciation of the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism (ACUI Sample Job Description: Director of the College Union, 2013). In this way, the role of the union director has evolved alongside other student affairs professional positions to be more effective and intentional in promoting student learning and development.

Auxiliary Services

The Great Depression made the business of running a union particularly important to administrators. A new focus on economic functions and issues displaced the educational and social nature of the union. In addition, union professionals were required to prove the value of the union idea in order to receive a portion of the limited funding available for operations and staffing (Butts, 1971). The surrounding community of the university also began to see many of the leisure and dining services provided by unions as unfair competition in hard times putting stress on town-gown relationships (Butts, 1971). Today, auxiliary services still play an important role in supporting the financial health of the union and maintaining town-gown relationships, but they also take part in student development and learning (Jacobs & Pittman, 2005).

Auxiliary services include professionals that oversee revenue producing services within the union. Depending on the services that the union offers, these professionals may manage areas such as the campus bookstore, dining services, catering, games room, hotel, or conference services (ACUI Sample Job Descriptions, 2012). Because auxiliary services are

significantly impacted by constantly changing student demands and market trends, it is important that union professionals working in this area analyze behavioral patterns and anticipate consumer needs. They must be able to understand and utilize consumer feedback in order to adjust and improve their services (Rullman et al., 2008). According to Jacobs and Pittman (2005), “auxiliary service leaders are the campus entrepreneurs who handle the vexing challenges that other campus employees are unwilling or unable to address appropriately.” These professionals work to bring necessary services together to meet the needs of the campus community (Jacobs & Pittman, 2005).

Auxiliary services professionals are also leaders in campus relations with the surrounding community (Sherwood & Pittman, 2009). In the past, town-gown relations involving auxiliary services have been tense due to competition (Butts, 1971). Today, it is the role of auxiliary professionals to successfully promote their value and goodwill in the community and build intentional partnerships with community businesses in order to alleviate this tension. This role will be increasingly important as university auxiliary units serve a larger consumer base in their communities (Sherwood & Pittman, 2009).

While unions are categorized as auxiliary enterprises, it is important for auxiliary professionals to keep in mind that this is not their primary function. The primary role of unions is to facilitate educational, cultural, and social experiences for students (Butts et al., 2012). In addition to managing the business functions of auxiliary services

as well as town-gown relationships, today's auxiliary professionals are also expected to operate as educators. Educators are defined as individuals who continually strive to teach and learn in their interactions with others. By embracing their roles as educators, auxiliary professionals are better able to communicate with other faculty and staff members and support the academic mission of the university. One way that auxiliary professionals can fulfill this role is by serving student customers and understanding how the services they provide contribute to student development (Jacobs & Pittman, 2005). This is not to say that the sole responsibility of auxiliary professionals is to facilitate student learning experiences, rather that it is important for auxiliary services to understand its role in the overarching purpose of the union, which is to foster student development. This understanding should guide the decisions of auxiliary professionals as they strive to maintain balance between the financial bottom line and student engagement (Jacobs & Pittman, 2005).

Campus Life and Program Management

In the 1950s and 1960s, some college unions began emphasizing the importance of leadership training for students and the inclusion of specialized counseling and teaching staff in the union to conduct these activities (Butts, 1971). These roles are the precursors to today's familiar professional student activities and programming positions. Professionals who work in campus life and program management positions often work with students, advise organizations, and plan events. Professionals in this area may work with

the union art gallery, multicultural affairs, leadership development, programming, student activities, Greek life, outdoor recreation, service learning, or student organizations (ACUI Sample Job Descriptions, 2012).

According to ACUI, programming and community-building are important parts of the role of the college union; "As the center of the college community life, the union complements the academic experience through an extensive variety of cultural, educational, social, and recreational programs. These programs provide the opportunity to balance coursework and free time as cooperative factors in education" (ACUI Role of the College Union, 2012). While programming in a general sense refers to planned activities for individual students or groups designed with the purpose of cultivating student development and learning, union professionals who wish to use programming as a means of community-building should engage students in the programming process. By involving students in the planning and implementation of programs and activities, union professionals can provide students with opportunities to for individual development while working together toward a common goal and fostering a sense of community (Roberts, 2011).

In addition to ACUI, many union professionals involved in campus life and program management are also affiliated with the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA, 2012). NACA was established in 1960 to help campus programmers stretch their budgets by creating connections between schools and businesses involved in campus programs. Today, NACA

specializes in helping student affairs professionals with program planning, risk management, multicultural education, event management, and leadership development (NACA, 2012).

Facilities and Operations

College union facilities and operations professionals include supervisors of areas such as facility maintenance, renovation and construction, event operations, and emergency management. Some typical positions in this category include Associate Director for Facilities, Building Manager, Event Services Coordinator, Maintenance Manager, and Audio Visual Coordinator (ACUI Sample Job Descriptions, 2012).

Facilities and operations professionals ensure that the union building is clean and functional. For some, it is difficult to understand how the work of facilities and operations professionals contributes to student learning and development, but like many student affairs practitioners today, these professionals are being held to an increasingly higher standard of student learning expectations (Butts et al., 2012). It is important for facilities and operations professionals to understand how students interact with their environments and how physical space influences student learning. Campus environments can communicate with students, shape behavior, and promote or hinder student development. For this reason, facilities and operations professionals should be intentional in their decisions regarding physical space within the union in order to engage students and create developmental opportunities (Strange and Banning, 2001).

Union facilities and operations professionals must be both flexible and visionary. Union spaces should be continually be assessed and conceptualized in order to meet the rapidly changing needs of the campus community. Because union facilities must constantly adapt and evolve to accommodate an increasingly diverse student population, new forms of technology, and additional services, union professionals “are charged with creating space that not only accommodates today’s needs, but also addresses as yet unknown needs of the future” (Butts et al., 2012, p. 234).

Standards and Competencies for the College Union Professional

The end of World War II and the G.I. Bill brought more students to higher education than ever before. The college union became the community center of the campus and students started to call for more activities, the arts, recreation, and student involvement (Butts, 1971). In 1946, as a response to the increasing complexity of union work, the ACU published *Standards in College Union Work* by Porter Butts to guide the practice of college union professionals. It outlined two functions of the profession essential in every union: the educational and the administrative. The educational function included recreation, student counseling, and advising student organizations in social and recreational fields. The administrative function included operating the building plant and its varied services. The publication described that the adequacy of the union staff could be determined by comparing the number of staff assigned to the sports and athletic programs to the staff appointed at the union for the same student body (Butts, 1971).

Standards in College Union Work was the first document to discuss the skills and competencies required for college union professionals. The author described the training at that time to be too specialized for the constantly changing union environment. Instead, he recommended focusing on the general qualifications necessary for success. These included the conception of the community center's place and purpose at the institution, the comprehension of the recreation needs of students, and an interest in making a student's experience within the union of educative and self-developmental value (Butts, 1971).

As the student affairs profession grew, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was created in 1979 to establish common standards, as well as a means of self-assessment, for all student affairs graduate programs and practitioners. CAS consists of thirty-five functional area standards, including the college union, which are reviewed and updated regularly (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). Union professionals should use the CAS standards to regularly assess the mission of the union, programs and services, financial resources, facilities and technology, legal responsibilities, issues of equity and access, campus and external relationships, diversity, ethics, and evaluation procedures. In addition, they should also use the standards to evaluate themselves and their work as professionals. The CAS standards provide union professionals with guidelines regarding the role of leadership in the union, organizational and management structure, and human resources (CAS, 2006).

In addition to the CAS standards, ACUI has established eleven core

competencies specifically for college union professionals, which are composed of knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary for professionals to be successful in the field. These competencies are applicable regardless of individual experience, position level, or job responsibilities. The core competencies include communication, facilities management, fiscal management, human resource development, intercultural proficiency, leadership, management, marketing, planning, student learning, and technology (ACUI Core Competencies, 2012). The development of the eleven core competencies was an extensive process beginning in 1999 and still continues today. In 1999, the initial task force was assembled to begin laying the foundation for the competencies by conducting an extensive literature review. In 2001, the Education Councils took the lead on the project. After determining the purpose of the competencies, outlining how members would use them, and validating the information through a member survey, a second task force released the final report in 2005 (History and Future of the Core Competencies, 2012).

In 2009, ACUI conducted an assessment of the competencies of new professionals in the college union field and found that, in general, new professionals are prepared for entry-level position responsibilities. The new professionals in this study reported high levels of communication, general administration, and management skills. New professionals in the field of college unions are typically responsible for providing direct services to students, so it is important that they are prepared to handle this work. Examples of such responsibilities include advising student

organizations or working with event management services. In order for new professionals to be successful in these positions, it is important that they are competent in areas such as student development theory, counseling, communication, multiculturalism, leadership, program planning, technology and social media, and ethics. Often, new professionals are competent in these areas and can meet the requirements of their entry-level positions (Moran, 2012).

Although new college union professionals have been found to be generally competent in the areas mentioned above, some studies suggest other areas in which they are lacking. These areas include budgeting and fiscal management, strategic planning, legal knowledge, campus politics and organizational culture, and research and assessment. While some would argue that not all of these competencies are necessary in an entry-level position, skills such as supervision, budget management, assessment, and understanding campus politics are often expected of new professionals today. New college union professionals will also need these skills to transition to future positions (Moran, 2012).

Currently, the competencies have been broadly accepted and incorporated by college union professionals throughout the field (History and Future of the Core Competencies, 2012). Implications of the core competencies outside the Association include serving as a basis for educating, hiring, and training college union professionals, advancing the position of the college union field within higher education, and aligning the profession with the mission of the university to cultivate academic

partnerships (Implications of the Core Competencies, 2012). Implications for the core competencies within ACUI include helping the Association better identify its purpose, evolve based on relevant trends, and create standards to promote excellence and professionalism (Implications of the Core Competencies, 2012). Future goals for the core competencies include continued assessment and validation of the competencies, institutionalizing the competencies into all aspects of the Association, and including the competencies into higher education and student affairs curricula (History and Future of the Core Competencies, 2012). College union professionals should also consider competencies developed for student affairs practitioners in general.

In 2010, NASPA and ACPA collaborated to develop professional competencies that apply to all student affairs practitioners, regardless of the specific functional area in which they work. These competencies provide student affairs professionals with basic expectations for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they should possess in order to be successful in their work. They also provide a framework for advancement and growth in these competency areas (ACPA & NASPA, 2010).

Although there is a significant amount of overlap between the ACUI core competencies and the professional competencies developed by ACPA and NASPA, there are also differences. This could be because there are certain competencies which are more relevant to union professionals in particular. For example, while basic advising and helping competencies are essential to all student affairs practitioners, it is not

included in the ACUI core competencies because it is not considered a primary function of union professionals. On the other hand, facilities, marketing, and technology are included in the core competencies for union professionals but not in the basic competencies for all student affairs practitioners. In order to become more well-rounded practitioners, union professionals should reference and include both sets of competencies in their professional development.

College Union Professionals Today

While history and tradition continue to play an important role in today's college unions, college union professionals should also be aware of the changing needs of the current student population and how the union must evolve to meet those needs. Examples of current trends on many college and university campuses that impact the work of the union include a larger percentage of minority, international and non-traditional students on campus, a need for more flexible academic schedule, and greater demand for and use of technology (Knell & Latta, 2006). It is important for college union professionals to understand these changes and adapt their facilities and services to meet the needs of their students.

In addition to changing student needs, modern college union professionals are also faced with many challenges such as privatization, fiscal management, facility maintenance and renovations, technological developments, and supervising multi-generational employees. In the "Profile" section of *The Bulletin*, current union professionals from around the world are spotlighted and able to share about their

role in the union and advice they have for their peers. Many of these union professionals are involved in repurposing and renovating underutilized spaces, building partnerships with local businesses to increase available services and lower costs, and fundraising to support existing and new projects and programs (Beltramini, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). They also often cite the importance of communication, challenge, innovation and preparedness as crucial to successful union work. The professionals highlighted work in operations, student activities, technological support, and facilities and the majority of them wear multiple hats in their positions. While the profession has grown in numbers from the past, it is obvious that the number of responsibilities has grown as well and union professionals are still expected to be skilled in a variety of functional areas.

Those in senior leadership positions play an important role in leading their organizations through these and other challenges. The success or failure of the college union is often in the hands of these professionals (Butts et al., 2012). In order to help college unions survive and thrive in times of change and challenges, it is important for leaders to develop new competencies and skills. In 2009, the first ever College Unions and Student Activities Professional Competency Assessment was used to identify competencies most used by college union professionals and competency areas of growing importance for the future (Beltramini, 2010). Professionals reported using communication and leadership competencies such as customer service (99.6%), integrity (97.1%), problem-solving (96.3%), interpersonal

communication (99.3%), and oral and written communication (100%), most often in their roles (Taylor & Willis, 2013). Professionals identified needing more training in real estate development, design and construction, energy and utilities management, fundraising, and cultural symbols and artifacts (Taylor & Willis, 2013).

In addition, another skill area in need of improvement for most 21st century college union professionals is fundraising with only 1.1% identifying themselves as “at least competent” (Beltramini, 2010). As many institutions face state budget cuts, higher education professionals in many areas including unions are finding alternatives to raising tuition and student fees. In order to be effective fundraisers, college union professionals must build relationships with potential benefactors in the community. Fortunately, this skill should come easily to many union professionals who are used to fostering campus community in their facilities (Butts et al., 2012).

Union professionals today face higher standards and an increasing expectation to facilitate meaningful learning and developmental opportunities for students (Butts et al., 2012). In order for union professionals to be successful in this area, they must be able to demonstrate how student experiences in the union are tied to concrete learning outcomes. For this reason, more college union professionals are learning to conduct empirical research. In the past, this was not necessarily a high priority for many union professionals; however, in today’s growing culture of assessment, empirical data is a convincing means of demonstrating the union’s contribution

to student learning, growth, and development. Data is also critical to gain funding and support. In order to assist union professionals in the evaluation of their services and student development programs, ACUI has collaborated with Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI) to develop assessment tools to measure their effectiveness. According to ACUI, data collected using these assessment tools “will enable participating professionals to develop new insights related to their practice of the ACUI Core Competencies of facilities management, fiscal management, human resource development, management, marketing, planning, and student learning” (Assessment Tools from ACUI and EBI, 2012).

Union professionals today are being challenged to increase their multicultural competence. Institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly diverse as they enroll more non-traditional, veteran, international, disabled, lower income, racially and ethnically diverse, and spiritually diverse students. Because of this increase in diversity on college and university campuses, union professionals cannot afford to ignore their need for multicultural competence and leave this work to multicultural affairs professionals. Union professionals must learn how to successfully serve and engage these diverse student populations by increasing their multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Stewart, 2012).

It is essential the college union profession continues to develop and assess the professional competencies, participate in continued professional development and learning, and engage in

relevant research for the operation, success, and evaluation of college unions in order to keep the union relevant in the future of higher education.

The Next 100 Years

The next 100 years could bring enormous change to the staffing of the college union as the need for brick and mortar higher education operations shift and change along with the seemingly constant reductions in funding at most institutions. New advances in technology and higher education's attempt to control the cost of a degree have made online courses prevalent and attractive. According to a study completed in 2011, 6.1 million students took at least one online course in the fall 2010, which was a 10.1 percent increase from the year before (Lytle, 2011). This supports the trend that the growth of online education "far exceeds the growth of higher education overall" (Lytle, 2011, para. 6). If this trend continues and fewer students are on campus, college unions will need to change the services offered in the facility to remain relevant. College union professionals may need to work with campus partners to centralize student services and create "fusion facilities" that combine campus functions to best utilize the space (Rullman et al., 2008). In a scenario where online education begins to dominate higher education, the demand for services and operating budgets will decrease, forcing college union professionals to consider eliminating positions and restructuring operations to be more efficient, cost-effective, and appropriate for the changing campus. Regular assessment will be essential in determining the needs of the campus and monitoring the effects of online

education on brick and mortar operations at institutions.

The demographics of the workplace and of students will continue to change over the next 100 years. Higher education is becoming increasingly diverse as institutions work to increase access and inclusion. Professionals in the college union must be prepared to understand and address the needs of diverse populations in order to fulfill its mission of creating community on campus. It is also important for union professionals to consider how the diversity of their institution is reflected in the staff and leadership in the union. Recruitment and support of underrepresented staff are necessary in creating an inclusive climate and should be a goal for all union professionals. In addition, current staffing and managerial practices require shifts as new generations enter the workforce and enroll in higher education. Currently, millennials are the incoming new generation to the world of work. Millennials are tech-savvy and prefer collaborative work environments with self-directed education and training (Mann, 2006). Student affairs is expertly primed to meet these needs and current professionals should capitalize on these strengths. In the next 100 years, college unions will see roughly four generations pass through their doors, all with varying needs, preferences, and methods for work.

Business operations are nothing new to the college union as an auxiliary enterprise; however, the next hundred years is likely to see an increased focus on profitability of auxiliaries as higher education searches to find funding while keeping cost of attendance low for students. As profit-making operations,

auxiliaries will be expected to fund and provide support to larger portions of campus activities and initiatives. For these reasons, college union professionals will require more knowledge of business operations, marketing, finance, and customer service. The shrewd professional will be able to competently blend an understanding of student affairs and student learning with sound business practices to effectively manage a college union and prove its continued worth to the university community. These skills will assist professionals in building a strong case in the event the validity and relevance of the union is questioned in the future.

In the first 100 years, college unions went from being entirely student run to employing professional staffs of

hundreds and from housing one professional focused on facility management to many departments ranging from catering to childcare. It is difficult to anticipate what the next 100 years will bring for the college union professional based on the rapidity of change in our current time. The college union idea continues to grow and morph to meet the changing needs of a new generation of students and with it, so must the college union professional. It is not difficult to see that union professionals must stay abreast of new trends in higher education and college unions and intentionally work to develop and improve upon the professional competencies outlined by ACUI and ACPA/NASPA. A strong foundation with these skills will prepare union professionals for whatever the future may bring.

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