

# **A TALE OF RHETORIC AND SURVIVAL: A MULTI-CASE ANALYSIS OF STUDENT AFFAIRS WITHIN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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## **Abstract**

In the light of decreasing government support albeit growing complexities of providing quality higher education, universities are adapting various coping strategies. The student affairs unit is one sector within the university which can reflect such adaptive strategies. Using a multisite-case study method of seven selected public universities in the Philippines, the study explores the roles of student affairs from the perception of its stakeholders and its tacit roles as emergent from an analysis of the university's context, these are: a) as a catalyst for sustaining institutional identity; b) as a source for supplemental material resource, c) as a provider of alternative learning from the academics, and, finally, d) as a mediator between the external and institutional environment. These roles reflect the attempts of student affairs in public universities in the Philippines to contribute to the holistic development of the students regardless of the challenges of its milieu. The findings could shed insight for policy makers, educational leaders and political leaders on how best to encourage, sustain and harness these substantive coping strategies.

*Keywords: student affairs higher education, educational development, student development, university educational leadership, educational context.*

## **Introduction**

Globalization concomitant with burgeoning growth in population produced a symptomatic tension among higher education institutions to provide access to as many students as possible while maintaining and even increasing the quality of education as means of achieving global competitiveness (UNESCO, 2006). This has catapulted a few well-endowed, mostly private universities to gain from these developments, while on the other end of the spectrum has inadvertently marginalized those, who have less resources, mostly public universities to be left on the fringes to cope with the transition. The situation of most public universities

of the developing and underdeveloped countries is reflective of this imbalance and this is further exacerbated by the continuous decrease in government funding (UNESCO, 2003). This paper aims to explore the adoptive strategies of public higher education, through student affairs, to promote student development amidst the challenges of lack of resource and even unstable political environment.

The findings of paper are lifted from a multi-site case study of student affairs of seven (7) public universities in the Philippines. Each site represents various academic foci and student population. For purposes of this paper, the study will focus on results on programs and services and the role of student affairs vis-à-vis the learning environment. The study uses the experience of Philippine public universities that comprise 11% of the 1,599 higher educational institutions in the country (UNESCO, 2007). The students in these public universities predominantly come from economically-marginalized backgrounds in geographical and economic locations where private educational entities are unlikely to survive.

The student affairs unit occupies an integral part in university management. In a sector that emphasizes rigorous quality and scholarship, the student affairs units, like any middle-management unit within many higher education institutions, are still wanting of substantive study (Mather & Faulkner, 2009). This reality is true for Asian developing countries such as the Philippines, and this may very well apply to many countries within the Asia and the Pacific region. In the Philippines, higher education faces tremendous pressure to calibrate itself to the demands of globalization, even as it struggles to survive in a milieu characterized by economic, social and political instability.

Student affairs or sometimes referred to as student services, is tasked to support the learning process through the provision of multifarious programs and services. Identified services ascribed as functions of Student Affairs include guidance and counseling, career, discipline, housing, transportation, student records, facilities, scholarship, admissions, campus ministry, and student organizations, as well as the provision of support for targeted groups such as international students, student athletes, student leaders, and student artists.

## **Context**

The Philippines is comprised of 55 ethnic groups, which speak 171 languages and dialects across the 7,100 islands that constitute the archipelago. The country is divided into three main islands: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The National Capital Region (NCR), where the nation's capital, Manila, is located, is in Luzon. Each major island has its own distinguished culture and ethnic identity such as Mindanao, where most of the Filipino Muslims live. Tagalog, the Filipino's national language, and English, the medium of instruction (ESCAP, 2000) are considered the country's official languages. The Philippine educational system is structured from basic education comprised of elementary and secondary school to tertiary and vocational education. Elementary education is comprised of six years, while secondary education, four years of comprehensive studies structured primarily to prepare students for the world of work. After high school, students may opt to

pursue a tertiary degree or a technical-vocational program. Student affairs generally offers guidance and counseling services in the primary and secondary levels, while services vary from university to university, but commonly consist of counseling, residential, supervision of student organizations, scholarships, discipline, arts and athletics, in the tertiary level.

## Methodology

The study covers seven public universities: three in the National Capital Region (NCR), two in Mindanao, and one each in both the Visayas and Luzon. These institutions represent the three major geographical islands of the Philippines. These sites are likewise chosen to represent various academic foci, student populations, and urban and rural locations.

**Table 1: Profile of Participants**

| Site  | Academic Focus    | Student Population | Location (Urban or Rural/ Island Location) | Salient Qualities   |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------|--|---|
| ONE   | Agriculture       | 8,000              | Rural/ Mindanao                            | Established primarily for indigenous Muslims. Located within the armed-conflict areas between the government and Muslim insurgents. |
| TWO   | Mix               | 26,000+            | Urban/ (NCR)-Luzon                         | Premiere state university of the Philippines; with satellite campuses all over the country.   |
| THREE | Mix               | 26,000+            | Urban/ (NCR)-Luzon                         | Known as the "citadel of youth activism"  |
| FOUR  | Agriculture       | 7,500+             | Rural/ Luzon                               | Recognized by the government as center for excellence in agricultural studies.  |
| FIVE  | Teacher Education | 7,000+             | Urban/ Visayas                             | Recognized in the Visayan islands to be among the best in teacher education.  |
| SIX   | Mix               | 6,000+             | Urban/ Mindanao                            | Formerly established for technical-vocational courses; with Student satellite campuses across Mindanao                              |
| SEVEN | Teacher Education | 7,000+             | Urban/ (NCR)-Luzon                         | Recognized as center for excellence in teacher education, with campuses around the country...                                       |

The study employs multi-site case study to provide a more in-depth interpretation of the reality of student affairs practice in public universities within the Philippines (Merriam, 1998). The multi-site case study employs three sources of data: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and site observation. It is

deemed suitable in investigating complex social units such as student affairs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Descombe, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). A total of ninety-eight individual interviews and eight focus group interviews are conducted to gather data related to student leaders, heads and staff of student affairs, alumni, and parents, superiors of heads of student affairs, faculty advisers, and mainstream students. Interview transcripts, documents and site observation notes were analyzed using the coding and categorizing technique of grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998). Since the findings presented in this paper are limited to the roles of Student Affairs and its dynamics with the learning environment, data was gathered from fifty-two (52) individual interviews, five (5) group interviews seven (7) handbooks, one (1) student affairs document, and two (2) student publications.

**Table 2: Number of Data Sources**

| SITE         | HD       | PRC       | STD       | GI-STD   | ADMIN    | FAC      | ALU      | GI-ALU   | SH       | DOC      | SP       |
|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Site One     | 0        | 4         | 4         | 0        | 1        | 1        | 1        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Site Two     | 1        | 5         | 0         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Site Three   | 1        | 4         | 4         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Site Four    | 1        | 3         | 2         | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Site Five    | 1        | 2         | 3         | 0        | 1        | 1        | 1        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Site Six     | 0        | 3         | 2         | 2        | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 1        |
| Site Seven   | 2        | 1         | 4         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 1        | 0        |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> |

**Legend :** HD-head of student affairs; ADM-Admin; ALU-Alumni; DOC-SPS Document; SH - Student Handbook; PRC-SPS Practitioner; STD- Student; SP-Student Publications and FAC- Faculty and GI-STD-Group Interview of students; GI-ALU-Group Interview of Alumni.

(**Note:** In the data processing, group Interviews were counted as one under its sector (e.g. group interview with students was counted as one answer under the student sector).

The first step is to fracture the raw data into incidents, which are sentences or paragraphs that answers the question or presents a salient idea. Labels or codes were then assigned per incident through the open coding process. Similar codes were then grouped together and categorized to form the dimensions of the phenomenon which is called the process of axial coding. When this was achieved a case description is generated using the dimensions axial coding established in axial coding and substantiated by the raw data (this is the part that the researcher goes back to the raw data and piece it together with the categories). The case description can be referred to as the paradigm of the phenomenon. These were then analyzed across the other cases for similarities and uniqueness. The last level of analysis is more precarious as it is both a pragmatic and intuitive undertaking where the

researcher reflects on the explicit data and discerns the causality and relationship of the phenomenon with other factors such as culture, which in effect reveals the real essence of the findings. The eclectic emergence of evidence is the differentiating variable between qualitative and quantitative research.

### **Theory and practice: The two faces of student affairs**

The goal of Student Affairs varies little with the overall goal of any educational institution (IASAP, 2001; Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2000). The intended outcomes of Student Affairs is defined almost the same as that of higher education, to wit: (1) high quality, well- rounded higher learning experience; (2) better access to higher education for students with varying abilities and backgrounds; (3) better retention and progress toward graduation; (4) higher graduation rate; (5) improved career and employment prospects; (6) a sustainable interest in lifelong learning, and (7) life as responsible members and citizens of their community (IASAP, 2001).

Student Affairs is primarily composed of the diverse disciplines of management, leadership and human or student development (Barr, 2000; Evans, 1996; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002; Miller, Winston, & Associates, 1991). What is commonly referred to in Student Affairs language as “student development” is the theoretical foundation for student services, while management is the action element (Miller, et al, 1991). Most authorities in the field of Student Affairs admit that the managerial and human developmental components are both necessary in the practice of Student Affairs (Creamer & Frederick, 1991), explicitly claiming that student affairs professionals are indeed educators with a unique role in the educational process (Hurst, 1980 as cited in Miller, et al., 1991). Experts assert that the educational functions of Student Affairs address student learning in both the formal and informal, or outside-classroom settings. In fact, the definition of curriculum itself includes student experiences within the learning environment that are not exclusively in the classroom (Glatthorn 1987, cited in Bago, 2001; Reyes, 2000).

### **The meaning of student affairs: Voices from the field**

The substantive heuristic of Student Affairs is complex; one which is amalgamation of expectations of its practitioners and stakeholders and one which is unconsciously shaped by the external and internal environment of the university.

The researcher initially asked the respondents to share their view on what the role of Student Affairs in the life of the university. A total of 147 incidents across sectors were extracted revealing 13 roles. These roles were then further re-analyzed and re-categorized, which were finalized into: a) Student affairs balance the academics by providing alternative learning; b) builds university community by sustaining its institutional identity and by mediating between the internal and external environment; c) and it addresses various student needs by supplementing university income.

**Table 3: Incident Counts of the Roles of Student Affairs**

| Responses                                  | Total      | HD        | ADM      | PRC       | STD       | SH        | DOC      | SP       | FAC      | ALU      |
|--|------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. Student Orgs & Activities               | 28         | 1         | 0        | 6         | 13        | 4         | 0        | 1        | 2        | 1        |
| 2. Maintains peace & order                 | 28         | 3         | 0        | 3         | 1         | 19        | 1        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| 3. Responds to student needs               | 19         | 3         | 0        | 4         | 9         | 1         | 1        | 0        | 0        | 1        |
| 4. Mediator                                | 15         | 2         | 1        | 2         | 6         | 1         | 1        | 1        | 0        | 1        |
| 5. Balances academics                      | 15         | 1         | 1        | 6         | 3         | 2         | 0        | 0        | 1        | 1        |
| 6. Provides total development              | 12         | 1         | 2        | 6         | 1         | 1         | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        |
| 7. Guidance and formation                  | 9          | 1         | 0        | 3         | 4         | 1         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| 8. Program provider                        | 5          | 0         | 0        | 1         | 1         | 3         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| 9. Organizes institutional activities      | 4          | 0         | 0        | 1         | 1         | 2         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| 10. Functional in terms of existing units. | 4          | 0         | 1        | 0         | 1         | 0         | 1        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| 11. Enhance student life                   | 3          | 0         | 0        | 1         | 1         | 0         | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| 12. No need for OSTUDENT AFFAIRS           | 2          | 0         | 0        | 0         | 2         | 0         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| 13. Promote student welfare.               | 3          |           | 2        | 0         | 1         | 0         | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                               | <b>147</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>43</b> | <b>35</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>4</b> |

**Legend :** HD-head of student affairs; ADM-Admin; ALU-Alumni; DOC-SPS Document; SH - Student Handbook; PRC-SPS Practitioner; STD- Student; SP-Student Publications and FAC- Faculty and PRT-Parents.

These types of interventions are commonly cited in student affairs literature as the most common operational tasks of student affairs in the administration and supervision of student organizations, as well as those of programs and services. This is evidenced in student affairs’ response to attending to personal and academic needs of students, handling disciplinary cases, and mediating between senior administration and students. Programs and services of student affairs are classified into developmental, academic support and survival-based support services. Developmental programs and services are interventions that are aimed at providing balance to the academics (e.g. arts, athletics, and Greek organizations). Academic support pertains to the programs and services that are meant to

reinforce or complement academic development (e.g., tutorials). Survival support services are various types of interventions, whether formal or informal, which assist the students in their basic subsistence (e.g., scholarships, health, housing, and food). The most active programs are those in student organizations, counseling and scholarships. All of the sites encourage the proliferation of student organizations as this serves as the backbone of student affairs. It is through the student organizations, where basically student affairs carry out its roles.

The Student Affairs salient findings of this study however lies in the tacit roles ascribed to student affairs. These implied roles are nascent to the research journey, and are revealed through site observations, re-analyzing of interview transcripts, and content-analysis of university documents and in scratching the surface beyond the descriptive data. By analyzing student affairs relational dynamics within the university and the external environment, four tacit roles of student affairs emergent in the study, namely: a) as a catalyst for sustaining institutional identity; b) as a source for supplemental material resource, c) as a provider for alternative learning from the academics, and, finally, d) as a mediator between the external and institutional environment. The significance of the tacit roles is that provides a context-based and substantive ascription of student affairs. Unlike the initial explicit roles which are mostly conscious perception and pre-set standards shaped by the orientation of how tertiary education is supposed to be. And this is predominantly derived from the American-education mould where Philippine higher education was patterned; whereas, the tacit roles are those which are emergent to the experiential reality of the students, staff and various stakeholders of student affairs.

The university is the immediate community of student affairs, as a member of this community; it is both a shaper and a reflection of the culture of the university. Site Three offers a glimpse on how institutional culture affects the practice of student affairs. Site Three is known to be the citadel of student activism among universities in the Philippines. Students' opposition of university administration has become the norm and protected ethos of the university. As the head of student activities cited "Activism is part of the identity of Site Three". Under this condition, the student affairs practitioner is perceived as more tolerant of sporadic student rallies or campus based activities than the practitioners in other Sites. In fact, areas and time periods for these types of activities are included among the services provided. On the other hand, universities like Site Five, a normal university, do not manifest the same activism but are instead more identified with the collaborative and collegial ethos of the teacher. The same case with Site Seven, another normal university, but its location in the National Capital Region makes it more exposed to the radicalism espoused by more aggressively activist public universities like Site Two and Three. Thus, in the case of Site Five and Seven, Student Affairs programs and services, particularly the activities it espouses are geared towards the arts and community building.

On a broader scope, one institutional identifier for most of the sites is the image that its students are smart despite the universities' material insufficiency. The majority of interviewees attribute the lack of resources to the public nature of

their institution as the key constraint in their work. However, deteriorated facilities and absentee faculty are considered embedded conditions within any government owned public higher education institution. Student respondents seem to perceive this as an identifier of public universities but justifies that such is not a deterrent in getting quality education. As one student in Site Five Student says

“If you go to University X, they would say you are rich. But if you come from Site Five, people would remark – wow, you are smart.”

Thus, a student from public higher education carries its own distinctive badge as one who not only survives but also thrives, if not better than those who are privileged private schools. In fact, most students (as particularly cited in Site Two), students call themselves “*skolar ng bayan*”, in English means “*scholars of the nation*”. This connotes as one who has proven to be intellectually deserving albeit economic status to be educated by the state. True enough, the participating public universities enjoy a reputation for producing good graduates. This is more apparent with Site Two which is the premiere public university of the Philippines.

Site Three offers another dimension to the role of Student Affairs, one which provides an alternative source of learning. Student Affairs is in fact defined by most student respondents as an “experiential” component of the educative process. The contribution of Student Affairs in the learning process may sometimes outweigh that of the academics, as expressed by a student leader from Site Three.

“I am more attached to my experience here than in the classroom because it has ideology and different ideas. That makes it more interesting to explore. Not all that I have learned came from the academics. I learned a lot from the community, from the organization, from my classmates.”(Student Leader1, Site Three)

The above student is a member of a student activist movement. He prides himself as one who has understood in depth through his interactions with people and his very life, the real essence of education, which is enlightenment of the real plight of the people and perceives it as more important than classroom learning. He spends most of his time with his group and its political activities. Student Affairs here is not an administrative structure but an experiential approach to learning, through the student organization. Site Three on the other hand, is highly tolerant of such students and in fact, such students enjoy a certain kind of distinction in campus. The same insights were derived from student activists from Site Two, Six and Seven. Site One and Four do not have strong activist leanings. In Site One, the adviser for the student council explains that students realize later on that they need to attend to their own needs than that of the country, being in a precarious situation of displacement and marginalization brought about by the war.

Another role of Student Affairs is to be source of additional resources for the university. The best example of this is Site Four where the head of Student Affairs

has used external relations to generate support, whether in cash or kind for the programs of the Student Affairs. An example is when the head of Student Affairs was able to get sponsorship for the plane fare of a group of students who will compete overseas. There are two crucial sectors Student Affairs keeps close connection with—the parents and the alumni. These two sectors have been allies of Student Affairs in financing its projects for the students. The student organizations through its sponsorship of university-wide activities are also contributing in effect to the human and material resource of the university.

Finally, the Student Affairs acts as a mediator between the external environment and the university. The best translation of this is with Site One, where Student Affairs provide the venue for cultural understanding among the various ethnic groups in the university. This is a very important role since Site One is proximate to the ongoing conflict between the Islamic insurgents and the military. Some students of this university could be children of either warring camps. In an interview with the adviser of the student government, he explains...

“...basically the integration of Christian, Muslim and other cultural minorities here in the university. Through OSA (Office of Student Affairs), there are activities on peace education, and the facilitation of understanding of cultural differences. Now you cannot call people from Maguindanao as Muslims (as there are also Christians in Maguindanao). Through OSA you realize that there are different ethnic groups you cannot stereotype in a particular religion; or generalize bad behaviors like stealing to a particular ethnic group (translated and summarized)”

Aside from the programs, another way Student Affairs can mediate between the external environment and the institutional community is to translate institutional practices to one that is acceptable to the external community. In the same university, standard protocol such as following the provisions of a student handbook cannot be automatically applied in handling disciplinary cases. The situation must be handled with cultural consideration otherwise it may result to a violent exchange between the families of the students. As explained by the former head:

“In an ordinary case of student discipline, the colleges handle it, but when Muslim and Christian students become involved in a brawl, they send the case to me. I do not directly handle the case, instead I ask representation of faculty members from the religious affiliation of both students or even an external personality who is well respected by the religious groups of the students, into an extra judicial dialogue. The resolution must be in a form that is acceptable to both parties, and sometimes this may include remuneration ...”(Former Head of Student Affairs, Site One).

The above tacit roles are contextualization of the theory and practice of Student Affairs. These roles emanate from the attempt of the universities to

surmount the obstacles of its oppressive milieu. First, is by reversing the social impression of public education as poor and deprived to one of strength and superiority. Second, is to turn networks and linkages as means of resources, from which additional funds and human resource can be made available. Third, is by expanding the classroom learning to the realities of life and society. And finally, Student Affairs calibrates the university to the nuances of the external environment.

All of these roles are shaped by the dynamics of Student Affairs with the students. It could also be said that Student Affairs is shaped by students. The kind of students the university admits will largely determine the kind of programs and services that will be provided. Moreover, it will also largely affect the way these programs and services will be administered. Essentially, students are internal and external environment of the university. They shape the institutional culture and bring with them the challenges of the external environment.

Students bring with them to higher education institutions their own cultures, orientations and needs, which together with the institutional factors form the mainstream culture of the university. The analysis of the collected interview data reveals two dimensions of the student factors - cultural and demographic. These factors are manifested in how students perceive the education they are receiving and their on-campus experiences. Together, these two factors are often referred to as student climate. Student climate, along with their satisfaction or positive experience of their student life, serves as a mediating variable to educational outcomes (Kuh, 2000). In fact, student satisfaction is cited as both a mediating variable and a desired educational outcome. (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 2000).

Kuh (2000) cites institutional mission and philosophy, faculty and student cultures, and school climate as substantive frames in the contextual conditions of student learning. He posits that these conditions of the institutions are integral to encouraging students to actively engage in the learning milieu through the academics or involvement in organizational and programmatic opportunities. Therefore, this presupposes that student learning is a function of what the student does or chooses to do with the opportunities, rewards, and support provided by the university. However, the study posits that this is not a simplistic proposition when factors beyond the university's scope and control assert themselves strongly in the learning environment, as the case of Site One. Indeed, Student Affairs often acts as a mediator between the university and such external forces, and as a key component in protecting the learning process. This degree of responsibility is not without its myriad of dilemmas as exhibited in the incident previously mentioned.

In organizational identity theory, leadership plays an important role in sustaining and redefining institutional identity (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000). Evidently Student Affairs acts as proponent and participant in sustaining and reinforcing the institutional identity. By reinforcing organizational behaviors attributing to institutional identity, this becomes a means by which students and staff make sense of their marginalized condition by glamorizing marginalization (as scholar of the nation) and by emphasizing the positive aspect of the university

(a university for good teachers). The reframing of one's condition is an important element in surviving and thriving in a difficult situation that is hard to change.

### **Conclusion: Reflections and more Questions**

In summary there are three factors that shape the roles of Student Affairs, one is the social-wide practiced embraced by the country or geographical context of the university, second is the perception of its stakeholders and third is its context. The significance of recognizing these three factors in the designing, development and delivery of educational programs should be mindful of these three aspects, particularly the last one. Today's higher education in south east is pluralized by the well-endowed and rich universities, who gets richer and the struggling universities, who gets less. Quality assurances are unmindful of contextual realities. Such is the glaring difference even within the state purview of education on Luzon (capital-centric) and Mindanao (community-centric) education. In Luzon it may be easier to adopt to widely accepted standards of practice, but with communities such as those in Site One, this is not easy without the socio-religious and political considerations. The same divide is prevalent among other Southeast Asian countries with the exception of Singapore, which is the only developed country.

This study brings to light the deeper challenges and complexities of Student Affairs particularly in a developing country such as the Philippines. A key question Student Affairs practitioners have to consider is how it can face the demands of globalization while addressing responsively the struggles within the local and immediate environment. With decreasing public funding, these tensions within and beyond will grow stronger and become more complicated. The educator from a developing world needs to balance the external needs with the delicate and personal requirements of facilitating student development. More often the pragmatic and practical can take precedence over the essential. The answer cannot be simplistically conjured. As in most cases, today's higher education institutions require both pragmatic and soulful work. The data identifies that context affects the way student affairs is perceived and practiced. This brings the discussion the realm of sociology where social structures are recognized to play an important part in education. There are three social structures that are brought to fore by the study, namely: the community structure which shapes the learning environment through the kind of students, the resources of the university and the nature of educational issues that confounds it, the institutional structure of the university as manifested in the form of the nature of its ownership (public), its philosophy, direction and resources, and finally the relational structure as made up of the interaction between the students and the adults (student affairs) practitioners, which in turn can transform both social and institutional structures (Lopez & Scott, 2000).

The study reveals that despite the marginal condition of the university, students as well as the Student Affairs practitioner seek multifarious ways to achieve its educational outcome of providing student development. Furthermore, Student Affairs and students try to find meaning in their situation and turn into a

source of pride and an identity-anchor. These attitudes, the author posits, make public higher education survive and thrive in a context replete with difficulties.

In the Philippine milieu, as well as most parts of the developing sector of the Asia Pacific region, where public higher education must contend with the challenge of surviving and giving quality education, student affairs acts as the catalyst that shields the students' learning process from the attacks of the environment, thus being a reflexive as well as a reflective response to both students and student affairs practitioners. Future studies may perhaps be directed to reveal the coping strategies adopted by educational leaders in difficult learning environments, such as those posed by developing countries. In doing so, existing leadership theories predominantly espoused by experts from Europe and Northern America, may become more relevant to and more inclusive in studying the different milieus of education.

Student Affairs goes beyond being an organizational unit in the educational landscape. It is a dynamic agent that shapes the learning environment through an offering of asynchronous learning opportunities, affecting the university through its multiple modalities of influences to ensure and even safeguard holistic student development, regardless of context.

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