In celebration of October’s Careers in Student Affairs Month (#CSAM15), Student Affairs staff at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) share their journeys to a career in higher education.

Student Affairs is a dynamic career and has a variety of specialties within it that speak to a diverse array of individuals. At a university that is growing and maturing and does not yet offer a traditional college student personnel master’s degree program many UAA staff are former Alaskan students who became introduced to the world of student affairs through student employment, while others are Alaska transplants from “the lower 48”. Whatever the path they took may be, student affairs in Alaska are alive and exciting. The Student Affairs professionals below illustrate the diverse paths to a career in higher education in Alaska. These are their stories…

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**Sam Holtshouser, Commuter Student Services Coordinator**

Masters of Science – College Student Personnel Services and Administration

Bachelors of Business Administration - Marketing and Management

**How did you get your start in Student Affairs?**

I was highly involved as a student leader and student staff member during my undergraduate years at the University of Alaska Anchorage. I loved my work within my business classes but also loved my work as a student leader. When I learned there was a place I could bring those worlds together and assist others finding their passions and success. I knew Student Affairs is where I needed to be and I went on the search for a graduate program that work be the best fit for me. The rest is history!

**What do you do in your position?**

Assist commuter students with a variety of services and programs to enhance their education and facilitate creating a sense of belonging to the UAA community. I work closely with student leaders who work to support their fellow peers’ success through services and programs that develop practical life skills, foster interpersonal, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, engage students in self-reflection and advocate for the needs of commuter students in the campus community.

**What advice do you have for student leaders interested in exploring a career in Student Affairs?**
Involvement within the campus community really sparks most individuals' interest in a career in Student Affairs. If you find yourself interesting in pursuing a career in Student Affairs I feel like the first question you need to ask yourself is are you willing/able to leave Alaska for at least two years? If so, go to the Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE), interview with graduate schools and find your fit! If Alaska is the place you want to stay and need to be then there are great master programs you can explore here too. Try and gain exposure to all that Student Affairs can be so you can find your passion. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, which is how you can grow the most!

**What is your favorite part about your role in Student Affairs?**
Working with Student Leaders, helping them find and see the connection of the experiences they have as Student Leaders and their career aspirations beyond their college experience. I love hearing from students how their involvement on campus has greatly impacted their overall success.

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**Whitney Brown, Coordinator of Student Affairs Research, Assessment & Staff Development**
Master of Public Administration - Education Policy
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration - Marketing and Management (Minor: Spanish)

**How did you get your start in Student Affairs?** When I was in high school and asked what I wanted to be when I grow up, I said I wanted to be in Student Congress for the rest of my life. I loved planning and organizing events, advocating for students, and the whole spirit of education. My guidance counselor kind of laughed and suggested business; so I went on to pursue business administration. It was during my first student assistant job however, that my eyes quickly opened up to the world of Student Affairs – I found the fit for me. I went on to be a graduate assistant where I further developed my niche in the field of assessment.

**What do you do in your position?** My primary role is to examine the student experience through data and research. I support university departments to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs and services, conduct research and surveys to measure student learning through outside-the-classroom campus experiences, and provide data to campus leaders for use in data-driven decision making. I also coordinate personal and professional development opportunities for the 150+ staff in the division – this includes efforts such as conferences, workshops, webinars, and trainings. This role enables me to support the development of campus programs and professional staff to enrich the student experience.

**What advice do you have for student leaders interested in exploring a career in Student Affairs?** Connect with professional staff who are involved in higher education organizations. You may develop a mentoring relationship with someone who can introduce you to a variety of experiences and expand your network. My mentor introduced me to NASPA, a national organization for student affairs administrators in higher education. Through NASPA I was able to attend conferences, apply for scholarships, access free webinars to learn more about the field, network with renowned university leaders, and meet other students also thinking about student affairs.
**What is your favorite part about your role in Student Affairs?** I love being a part of the campus culture. Universities are so alive with growing and brilliant minds and it's exciting to be able to engage with people from all walks of life every day – I am always learning. My position allows me to use my analytical skills and strategic thinking to make a difference within a complex system, while still being immersed in an environment of high energy, lifelong learning, passion, and tradition.

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**Ryan J. Hill, North Hall & First-Year Experience Residence Coordinator**

Masters of Education - College Student Affairs Administration  
Bachelors of Arts - Political Science and German (Minor: English)

I love my job as a Residence Coordinator at UAA! It is amazing working at a place where people matter more than dollars. College campuses are also vibrant places to work. There is a consistent offering of concerts, lectures, exhibits, plays, and other personally enriching activities. It is also very fulfilling to work with young people at such a transformative time in their lives. I hope you’ll consider a career in Student Affairs!

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**Liz Shine, Marketing & Creative Design Coordinator**

Bachelor of Fine Arts - Graphic Design and Illustration  
Associate of Arts

**How did you get your start in Student Affairs?** I started as a student worker (Graphics Manager) for UAA Student Activities while working toward my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at UAA. I always knew it would be an amazing opportunity to return to the Student Affairs environment after I obtained my degree. So, after graduation and graphics experience away from the university I returned to work for Student Affairs about 3 years ago.

**What do you do in your position?** I’m the Marketing & Creative Design Coordinator for the Student Affairs division of Student Access, Advising & Transition. I create advertisements, publications, and other print and digital media to support the departments and programs within Student Affairs. I also photograph Student Affairs events, serve as a liaison between Student Affairs staff and print/promo vendors, and I lightly dabble in social media management.

**What advice do you have for student leaders interested in exploring a career in Student Affairs?** There are a lot of different job types that keep Student Affairs running and many career paths to take you there. My suggestion would be to explore student employment within Student Affairs to get a sense of what it’s like and how your dreams and goals might mesh with the mission of Student Affairs.
What is your favorite part about your role in Student Affairs? I love being able to do what I love in a meaningful way. I find it really inspiring to think that the design work I do may help other students on their way to achieving their dreams – whether it's a poster for an event that sparks someone’s career passion or an ad for a leadership opportunity that helps someone get their foot in the door of their dream job, it's something I think about regularly.

Lora Volden, University Registrar
Master of Counseling - Student Affairs and College Counseling
Bachelor of Arts - Applied Psychology

How did you get your start in Student Affairs? As a RA during my undergraduate years at St. Cloud State.

What do you do in your position? Streamline the various processes that student’s go through as part of their path towards degree/certificate completion (registration, transfer evaluation, transcripts, scheduling, and degree audits).

What advice do you have for student leaders interested in exploring a career in Student Affairs? Get involved. Do a variety of things. Follow current trends in higher education. Go to a great graduate school.

What is your favorite part about your role in Student Affairs? Making processes simpler for students so they can concentrate on their academics and lives.

David Tranberg, Recruitment Coordinator
Bachelor of Arts – English and Dual Languages

I'm proud to be a UAA Seawolf Alum. I graduated with a degree in English and Dual Languages: Japanese and Spanish. I came from Georgia to come to school here and I've never looked back. Alaska is a beautiful and wild place. The same goes for UAA. I coordinate our Preview Days and campus tours. I love meeting new prospective students and showing them around our campus and the UAA community. If you ever want an in-depth introduction to all that UAA can offer you, I'd love to show you around!

Alaska: Careers in Student Affairs
By Whitney Brown
Coordinator of Student Affairs Research, Assessment & Staff Development
University of Alaska Anchorage
wabrown3@uaa.alaska.edu

Sam Holtshouser
Commuter Student Services Coordinator

Do you enjoy student leadership and on-campus employment experiences? Are you fulfilled by helping others and working with people on a personal level? Do you want a dynamic and energizing workplace where each day is different and filled with new experiences? Did you know you can make a career of those experiences? Let’s explore how your University of Alaska Anchorage experience can lead you to a career in student affairs.

**What is Student Affairs?**
Student Affairs at UAA is an area within the institution that together provides an environment for our diverse student population to reach their greatest potential through inspiration, accessibility, and support. Student Affairs throughout the world serves as a critical aspect of the higher education experience. Student Affairs may have varying official titles and departments within it at varying institutions but the common thread is a collection of student support departments, services and programs at institutions of higher education that enhance the growth and development of students.

Student Affairs is a vibrant profession that includes a broad range of specializations in university offices such as Student Activities, Admissions, Campus Recreation, Career Services, Student Conduct, Health & Counseling, and Multicultural & Native Student Services, just to name a few, as well as responsibilities in human resources functions, marketing, facility management, budget development, and information technology. If you enjoy the campus environment, working with others to achieve their goals, and human growth and development, Student Affairs may be for you!

**Why Student Affairs?**
- The types of positions within student affairs are endless - whatever your passion is or unique skillset you have, there is likely a role for you.
A career in student affairs keeps you on your feet by offering continuous growth with unique experiences each day, providing you challenge and support and the opportunity to develop new skills and leadership roles.

This fun and inspiring work environment offers a fulfilling career with the opportunity to make a difference in students' lives - maybe even "the" difference in students' lives.

College and universities offer competitive salaries and amazing benefits - not only can you benefit from vacation time, medical and dental benefits, and retirement plans, you are provided access to reduced/free tuition, campus events, and recreational opportunities.

With campuses all over the world, you can work nearly anywhere and in whatever environment best suits you - campus range from urban to rural, large to small, public or private, religious, demographically diverse, and more.

Where to start – how does one enter a career in student affairs? These are some tips on how your UAA experience can lead you to a career in Student Affairs.

Undergraduate Student at UAA

- Any major can lead to a career in student affairs. Many professionals in student affairs don't discover the career field until they are a student themselves in college.
- Focus on achieving strong academic performance, developing effective oral and written communication skills, and engaging in campus activities and leadership experiences.

Exploring Student Affairs

- Get a taste for different roles in student affairs through on-campus student employment experiences and by meeting university staff.
- Engage in leadership experiences - start by participating in student organizations, academic clubs, or community service or go further by becoming a campus ambassador, tour guide, resident assistant, mentor, or member of the student government or a judicial board.
- Attend workshops or conferences to learn about the diverse roles and departments at a university.
- Join a professional organization - student memberships are generally very cheap and give you access to great resources and networks to get you started.

Graduate School & Career Preparation

- Though you can gain valuable experience as an undergraduate, many student affairs positions require a masters degree. The masters degree and applied skills through professional experiences are generally most important to employers.
- Student affairs professionals come with a variety of educational backgrounds. Traditional masters degree programs major in educational administration, higher education, student affairs, or counseling.
- Apply for a graduate assistantship. These positions provide meaningful professional experience and allow you to further explore and develop your niche in the field. Many assistantships come with a tuition waiver, making graduate school much more affordable.
• A great way to apply for graduate assistantships and find a program that meets your interests in an efficient and affordable manner is to attend to Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE): https://www.theope.org/. OPE provides an efficient means for college and university employers to meet and interview candidates from across the country. Most employers interview for entry level, graduate assistant, and post-master's degree residence hall positions. One may also find limited Student Activities, Programming, Leadership Development or Greek Affairs positions. OPE occurs every February at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

• When you are ready to apply for a full-time professional position or just want a better sense of what positions are available, check out The Placement Exchange (TPE): https://www.theplacementexchange.org/. TPE is the largest student affairs career placement service with seven sponsoring national student affairs organizations. Each March, hundreds of institutions and hundreds more job seekers come together to find a perfect fit. The TPE online job board is also a great resource year-round.

Have more questions about a career in student affairs? Feel free to contact us or ask one of the more than 100 Student Affairs professionals at UAA. Visit UAA Student Affairs online at: https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/studentaffairs/.