Seamless Learning in Student Development and Formation: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

The researcher implemented a systematic literature review to examine the trends and issues of seamless learning in student development and formation. We collected and analyzed a total of eighteen (18) journal articles that studies and discusses seamless learning, student development, student formation and student leadership in the recent decade. The seamless learning process can be utilized for student development and formation programs by offering self-regulated or independent learning activities together with face to face and in-group learning sessions. Using qualitative thematic analysis, this systematic literature review demonstrates that there are various designs and approaches in integrating student leadership, development, and formation in a seamless learning model.

Keyword: seamless learning, student development, student formation, student leadership, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, formal and informal learning in different environments are being explored by different universities to provide a holistic education for the students. As a result of the pandemic, online or remote and onsite learning modalities are being used by teachers and students to achieve the learning objectives of each course.

With these changes, student affairs is challenged in developing and implementing developmental, formation and leadership programs with its student leaders. Thus, modes of implementation must also be updated in order to understand and connect with the students.

Students may have different perspectives on each learning modality, but both have advantages that can be maximized for learning. The onsite or in-person learning provides satisfaction for students to nurture socialization, physiological health and view education in a collectivistic way. On the other hand, online or remote learning is optimal for students to be present in their different duties and adapted an individualistic approach in learning (Photo poulos et al., 2023). This type of learning is also true to the student affairs section, where programs and services are being held in a combination of online and on-site set-ups.

Seamless learning provides independence for the learners to explore different learning techniques as well as having the responsibility to accomplish their tasks in various learning environments. Through this method, the students are provided with contextually enriched problem solving opportunities that result in highly transferable learning (Lee, et.al, 2023).

Thus, this research aims to examine the different trends and issues of seamless learning in student development and formation. Including the identification of different frameworks and assessments in student leadership in the seamless learning method.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a systematic literature review method in this research, which was divided into two phases. First is the identification of the studies, and followed by the analysis of the data.

The researcher used the Taylor and Francis Online as the source for the data collection, using the keywords seamless learning, student development, student formation and student leadership for journals published from 2014 to May 2024. Eighteen (18) studies were collected from the database. All studies are included in the first five (5) pages of the results based on relevance. Secondly, the data extracted from the research were grouped and analyzed thematically.

Lastly, the literature search period concluded on a specific date, the systematic review excludes publications after that date.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seamless Learning in Student Affairs

Seamless learning is currently identified as one of the best ways in recalibrating the different programs in student affairs. It is found advantageous in providing learners with vivid and highly interactive learning experiences, however there are potential evaluation hurdles associated with it (Moon, et.al, 2023).

Gulley & Mullendore, (2014) highlighted that seamless learning is a concept that fosters connection between students in and out of class experiences to facilitate learning. With this, it reminds the faculty members of higher education institutions to be intentional in coordinating the curriculum both for student affairs and academic perspective. The identified points for collaboration for the student affairs to be seamless in the environment include advising, orientation, registration and student discipline (Gulley & Mullendore, 2014).

Using seamless learning also means that specialized and personalized learning experiences tailored to the students needs will be crafted to address the learning needs (Moon, et al., 2023). And this involves the use of gadgets and technology-based equipment, students are learning mobile across formal and informal settings (Ly & Kearney, 2023).

Wrigglesworth and Harvor, (2018) found in his study, the students are using their smartphones to actively create their own learning environments that overcomes the spatial and temporal limitations and the traditional formal way of learning. This affirms the findings of Ly & Kearney (2023) that seamless learning is aligned with mobile learning across multiple contexts.

In finding their way, the students appreciate a goal directed way of learning. The blended learning provides a seamless learning experience for the learners, due to the enough opportunities and support across different learning environments (Chen, et.al, 2021). In the same study, it is highlighted that adult learners simulate a three part process of learning which includes classroom learning, tech-enabled simulation and workplace learning. With this 3-part process, the learners are provided with concepts and theories, opportunity for self reflection and with class discussion, and experience.

Student Development and Student Leadership

Student development concepts and theories started in the 60's are focused on the progress of students from primary to higher education into the workforce (Shpigelman et al., 2022). It is an unspoken goal of the educational institutions to feed the workforce towards global development.

As we develop, these theories have evolved. Further, the third wave of developmental theories is arising and introduced the power dimension to the field and applied critical and post structural approaches. Currently, it is now paving the way to contextual study the identity of the students (Shpigelman et al., 2022). This affirms the importance of understanding the learner as a whole person.

The student development in the student affairs have incorporated the sustainable development goals (SGDs) in their programs in different forms such as basis for service learning programs, student leadership and in building student organizational spaces (Schreiber & Torabian, 2023). With the current situation in the world, the higher education institutions are challenged to create programs that will enable their learner's to contribute

for its betterment. Hence, coordination with the stakeholders in academic and non-academic programs are important in creating a seamless learning for the learners.

Leadership of the students is now being seen as a main contributor in the impact of higher education (Kimball & Ryder 2014). From this perspective, the student affairs initiatives on sustainable, student centered and mission driven programs are being highlighted.

At present, leadership theories on servant leadership are still being used in different programs of student affairs. Servant leadership introduces moral compass to enactment of leadership by focusing on the awareness, foresight, conceptualization and empathy of the leader (Kimball & Ryder 2014). It starts with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first (Gigliotti, 2015). Therefore, servant leadership complement the social change model of leadership that is described as "purposeful, collaborative, values based process that results in positive social change.

In servant leadership, the identified three streams of influence are (1) community-wide need, (2) institutional support and (3) student interests. These influences are creating a window of opportunities for the development of sustainable, student centered and mission driven leadership education initiatives (Kimball & Ryder 2014). This will provide a comprehensive, holistic and transformative program that integrates academic learning and student development.

Leadership and spirituality are important areas of self development. It is affirmed by Rozeboom, et al., (2016) that higher education can positively shape the development of skills in each. The improvement of these two includes their openness to exploration of a higher power, connectedness to others and personal authenticity (Rozeboom et al., 2016). In relation to this, interfaith leadership is also identified as an area for social change. Campbell and Lane (2014), shared that the leaders look for ways to disrupt negative narratives around religious difference and challenge the status quo of disengagement (Campbell and Lane, 2014).

Understanding spirituality also bridges a general framework for bridging theory into practice (Rozeboom et al., 2016). The research on spirituality and leadership showed its direct positive relationship with the college students. The findings reveal the equanimity is significantly high for student leaders than non-leaders (Campbell & Lane, 2014). In the same research, it is defined that a person with equanimity is able to (1) find meaning in times of hardship, (2) feels at peace or is centered, (3) sees each day as a gift, and (4) feels good about life's direction (Campbell & Lane, 2014).

With this, the student affairs professionals are challenged to model the way not only examine their spiritual leadership practices but also examine the programmatic structure for the development of student leaders. When educators engage in meaningful learning in their professional roles, they must engage in spaces where they are discovering new practice, acknowledging and discussing multiple perspectives on learning and finding ways to integrate this into their own identity as an educator (Hill, 2020).

To keep the students engaged in different development and leadership programs and to promote the faculty - student partnership to curricular co-creation, Burk-Rafel et al., (2020), identified four activators on the student engagement that were related to faculty which are (1) recruiting collaborative faculty, (2) broadening student leadership roles, (2) empowering student leaders, (4) recognizing student successes (Burk-Rafel et al., 2020).

The Social Change Model (SCM) speaks understanding of leadership, as it provides a framework for individuals and groups to engage in leadership for social change. The SCM is a model of college student development that focuses on the knowledge, values, or skills students need to develop in order to participate in effective leadership focused on social change (Campbell & Lane, 2014). This model is commonly used by student affairs professionals. However, while SCM provides necessary attention to the leadership qualities of a good leader, Whitten (2016) proposed to add two (2) C's which are contextual support and college support. Contextual support is the primary role of student affairs in relation to student leadership. It involves providing equitable access to leadership development, equitable engagement in leadership, student hiring practices, student belonging/quality of life and its effects on leadership development, intersectional realistes with the student body, values within student leadership, student sense of safety and freely engaged in all aspects and

resources required for students to engagement. The college support is focused on the responsibilities of the college as a whole including other faculty and staff. These can be identified as the professional development regarding identity development, institutional provision of resources, staffing patterns, staff care and equitable staff hiring practices (Whitten, 2016).

One of the good practices initiated by the Florida State University is their Undergraduate Certificate in Leadership Studies. It is a program that presents the grounded leadership theory in a seamless learning model. A collaboration between the Center for Leadership and Social Change Division of the Student Affairs and the Department of Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education is made in developing and managing the course. There are five courses included focused on knowledge, skills, and values of leadership within specific contexts. The last course is a pre-approved course that supports their overall training (Guthrie and Bovio, 2014).

This 18-credit interdisciplinary and experiential program that prepares students for leadership in multiple contexts through theory to practice, experiential learning, service - learning projects are used to prepare the students in leadership for social change (Guthrie and Bovio, 2014). The research revealed that the success of the program is achieved through the use of a seamless learning model and the application of the student's learning into practice (Guthrie and Bovio, 2014). It should be noted that the development of an intentional curriculum is significant in this kind of program, predominantly because of the appropriate assessment methods that come with it.

In addition to the leadership program practices, the Villanova Leadership Academy is created to provide intentional leadership programs for the students at Villanova University. Their program of activities include (1) emerging leaders institute, (2) leadership lunch series, and (3) participation in the national leadership training at Washington D.C. (Gigliotti, 2015).

In the context of student affairs, assessment is increasingly receiving attention, as it is now being provided with equal importance to program development and implementation. The student leadership initiatives assessment provides student leaders with a deeper awareness of the larger organizational identity, allows them to identify ways in which their leadership responsibilities and accomplishments contribute to the spirit of community and moves beyond formal communication of a mission statement to focus on the everyday management of its meanings (Kimball & Ryler, 2014). The participants of the Undergraduate Certificate in Leadership Studies in the Florida State University asked to reflect, often through weekly reading activities and make meaning from their experiences.

Student Formation

Student formation is one of the core foundations of student affairs. It is rooted to the idea of nurturing the student's values and faith. Rallying with the institution's mission and vision, the programs to be developed must be aligned with it. Commonly, faith and humility is one of the values being cherished in a higher education institution. In a study made by Barrett (2018), student leaders who participated in different leadership programs of Christian Colleges operationalize humility as a means for self-assessment, ability to acknowledge mistakes, openness to new ideas, keeping abilities and, low self-focus and the appreciation of the value of all things (Barett, 2018).

The use of online asynchronous methods or distance learning created a concern for the educators especially on the student's building genuine relationships and sense of community required for the formation to flourish (Hockridge and Bower, 2023). However, on the same research, it was found that there is no significant difference on the spirituality characteristics of on-campus and distance students, proving that the modality of the formation program is not a hindrance in achieving the desired results. The sense of community can still be fostered in a fully online or hybrid set-up by setting schedules of optional individual consultation, and group meetings in different modes.

It is argued that the online or distance formation program is providing an opportunity for the students to have self-formation. However, based on the definition of Nieminen and Yang (2023), the student self formation is

not about isolating them from an environment or focusing on an individualistic process. It is to be noted that a "public" aspect of individual formation is needed. Following the third wave of theories on development, the whole human development process must be taken into consideration, including the building of a sense of community.

The use of a learning management system is also seen as helpful in the implementation of student formation programs. Aside from the content, there are other factors that are equally important such as the look, navigation and usability of the online spaces for the students. The contents must be produced and categorized depending on each unit and structured assessments using clear verb driven instructions for tasks, provision of multiple forms of media including pre-recorder videos, audio files and written transcript (Nieminen and Yang, 2023).

The assessment of the student formation programs is essential for its continuous development. However the student affairs practitioners must be inclusive and sensitive to the different needs of the learners. Currently, the universities are providing assessment to check the students' learning vis a vis its expected outcome, then the student formation programs are pressed to equate the students' development into a numerical grade. These numerical grades are providing building blocks for the student formation to determine students identities but provide totalising knowledge that is powerful in shaping the students (Nieminen and Yang, 2023).

Peer feedback is an opportunity for students to foster development of learning communities in both physical and digital environments (Nieminen & Yang, 2023). Student affairs practitioners are encouraged to create safe breathing spaces to avoid stress and anxiety of students. In addition, a partnership with the students in developing the assessment is advised to promote a wider systemic self formation process.

Student formation is a continuous process that connects the becoming of the students in the past and future (Nieminen & Yang, 2023). Commonly, the assessments are developed per unit or course, however for student formation a programmatic assessment must be provided to the learners to achieve students flexibility and becoming.

CONCLUSION

The researcher synthesized eighteen (18) empirical journal articles in the field of seamless learning, student development, student formation and student leadership. This systematic review determined that a seamless learning model can be implemented in the different student development and formation programs in student affairs. Thus the researcher concludes that the student affairs practitioners must:

1. Develop and implement intentional developmental leadership and formation programs that can be offered in online and onsite mode with options for synchronous meetings to continuously build the social relationships of the students;

2. Collaborate with the academic and other departments in the institution to create a seamless transition and achieve the institution and student's goal in learning;

3. Continuously develop formation activities for the students and student leaders;

4. Maximize user friendly websites or apps for the intentional online learning of the students. It is advised to use apps that will greatly improve the usability and navigation in a personal computer and smartphone settings;

5. Utilize the different learning and developmental theories such as servant leadership, interfaith leadership, and social change model in developing programs for the students;

6. Ensure the students participation in the development, implementation, assessment and evaluation; and

7. Continuously listen to the conversations and consultations with the students and try to integrate it in their own lives.

Overall, the seamless learning model has proven its' beneficial integration in the student development and formation programs of student affairs. Learning does not only happen inside the classroom, the researcher argues that innovation, learning and formation can happen in response to the demands of academics, institutions and communities. Amidst all the issues encountered on planning, usability, accessibility and assessment, this model can still provide a significant impact to the students.

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