

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2026, Vol. 7, No. 9, 3791 – 3814

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.07.09.06>

Research Article

Frontlines of Student Support: Narratives of Student Affairs Practitioners in Higher Education Institutions in Masbate

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Article history:

Submission 31 August 2026

Revised 10 May 2026

Accepted 23 August 2026

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the this study is to explore the experiences of student affairs and services (SAS) practitioners in the Province of Masbate, particularly describing how they manage and administer the student affairs and services in their respective institution, the challenges encountered in the implementation of academic support services such as (a) student development services, (b) student welfare services and (c) institutional student development services. Further, the study described the solutions employed by practitioners to achieve institutional goals. The study utilized qualitative approach and narrative design to interpret the experiences of student affairs practitioners in the eleven (11) higher education institutions (HEIs): one (1) State University/ College (SUCs); four (4) Local Universities/ Colleges (LUCs) and six (6) Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) situated in the Province of Masbate. Findings derived from the analyzed themes indicated management practices which enabled a smooth delivery of support services to the student community, however, some practitioners experienced management factors that hamper the delivery academic support. Notable challenges were also encountered by the student affairs and services (SAS) practitioners in the student development, student welfare and institutional student development programs. Amidst the difficulties, solutions and best practices were imparted by practitioners which ensure satisfactory and holistic academic support services among students in the college, thus led to creation of comprehensive development plan which practitioners may apply in their respective academic institutions.

Keywords: *Best practices, Challenges, Experiences, Student affairs and services*

How to cite:

Comedor, J. F. (2026). Frontlines of Student Support: Narratives of Student Affairs Practitioners in Higher Education Institutions in Masbate. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 7(9), 3791 – 3814. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.07.09.06

Background

Student support services have been shown to enhance student performance, contribute to academic success, and increase the likelihood of degree attainment in higher education (Johnson et al., 2022). Kaur (2016) defined student support services as the facilities and activities designed to make learning more accessible and engaging, emphasizing that the quality of education depends significantly on these services.

According to the Preamble of the 1998 World Declaration on Higher Education, “the younger generations should be equipped with new knowledge, skills and ideals through higher education.” The UNs Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, target 4.3, which seeks to guarantee that equal access to affordable and quality technical vocational and higher education is achieved by 2030, supports this (Department of Economics and Social Affairs, n.d.). In this sense, student affairs play a crucial role in higher education by supporting both the academic and non-academic endeavors of the students leading to the expansion of the profession responding to the evolving and multifaceted needs of the students: from orientation and residence life to career services and post-graduation decision making (Schwartz & Lazarus-Stewart, 2016)

Historically, student affairs professionals emerged as early as the 16th century where “lady principals” and “matrons” were among the earliest individuals tasked with supporting students in collegiate settings (Niddifer, 2001; Schwartz and Lazarus-Stewart, 2016). Eventually, the shift toward emphasizing student learning was marked by the publication of ACPA’s Student Learning Imperative (1994) and NASPA’s Learning Reconsidered (2004), which positioned student affairs professionals as partners in the academic mission alongside faculty. The joint publication of the Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners by ACPA and NASPA in 2010 further elevated the profession by emphasizing accountability and delineating professional roles in student development (Coones and Wilson (2009; Schwartz and Lazarus-Stewart, 2016). In Asia, Student affairs and services (SAS) as a profession has evolved within the broader context of capacity building which

enabled the practitioners’ readiness to perform the roles and responsibilities expected of them in the ever-changing landscape of higher education (Sen, 1999; Songco et al., 2023).

Keating (2020) concluded that “the professionalization of SAS is a sustained work in progress as the practitioners engage in opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding as lifelong learners.” The continued commitment to fostering student development across various domains (Ludeman et al., 2009) led to the establishment of the Asia Pacific Student Services Association (APSSA), whose strong regional presence has inspired the emergence and growth of SAS associations within its member countries.

In the Philippines, the existence of the Philippine Association of Practitioners of Student Affairs and Services (PAPSAS) provided an avenue for the organization of student affairs professionals in the country. The Philippine Association of Practitioners of Student Affairs and Services (PAPSAS) is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in student affairs and services becoming an effective channel in the development of the skill and capabilities of practitioners in the country (PAPSAS, 2021). Likewise in the Bicol Region, the establishment of Bicol Council of Deans/Directors for Student Affairs and Services (BCODDSAS) convened by the Commission on Higher Education – Regional Office V (CHEDRO V) aimed to deliver policy awareness, conversation and sharing of practices and capacity-building opportunities for the higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Bicol Region.

Through CMO 9, s. 2013, Higher Education Institutions must establish an office to manage student affairs and services and ensure an adequate number of qualified and competent personnel to serve the student population. This provision emphasizes the nature of the profession as a collaborative effort among professionals of diverse fields of expertise as they play a crucial role in the development and delivery of services to students in universities and colleges, thus, success in this field requires skills in administration, management, and interpersonal facilitation, as well as solid understanding of student development theory and functional responsibilities (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Grabsch et al., 2019); consequently, efficient

service delivery and attainment of institutional objectives depend on proper resource management (Baker & Thomas, 2020; Gonio et. al., 2024)

In the study by Seifert et al. (2015), lack of funding was the most commonly cited issue; 35% of UK respondents, 30% of Canadian respondents, and more than a quarter of participants from Australia and New Zealand identified reduced funding, budget cuts, and a lack of resources (both human and financial) as significantly impacting their ability to perform their work effectively. Rupande (2016) concluded that student affairs professionals face daily challenges, including the responsibility to shape student character, issues of excessive and underage alcohol abuse, limited time to conduct student affairs activities, insufficient funding for these activities, and student retention problems. Specifically, Henderson (1995), as cited in Rupande (2016), pointed out that higher education institutions must pursue multiple funding sources, both within traditional frameworks and across public and private sectors.

In this study, the experiences of student affairs professionals are described as practiced in the Province of Masbate, Philippines. Likewise, the study looked into the challenges and solutions ensuring effective and sustainable services to the college students in the tertiary education institutions in the province.

This study explored the experiences of students' affairs and services practitioners in the province, the management and administrative aspect practiced by higher education institutions (HEIs), the potential challenges encountered, and solutions crafted to ensure effective and sustainable services in the learning community. Specifically, this research sought answers to the following:

1. How do practitioners manage and administer student affairs and services in the SUC, LUCs and PHEIs?
2. What challenges do the practitioners encounter in managing student affairs and services, in terms of:
 - a. Student Development Services
 - b. Student Welfare Services and
 - c. Institutional Student Development Programs and Services

3. What solutions were made by SAS Practitioners to address the challenges in managing student affairs?

Methods

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, specifically employing Narrative Design. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2000, in Creswell & Creswell, 2018), Narrative Design is appropriate for studying the experiences of individuals by exploring the stories they live and share to describe the experiences of student affairs and services practitioners across various higher education institutions in Masbate describing their lived stories as they facilitate their units or offices in providing services to support the holistic development of the students.

Participants

Administrative heads of the institution-level student affairs units or office on campuses referred to as Vice President, Chief, Administrator, Dean, Directors or Coordinators for Student Affairs (Winston et. al., 2013) selected for their direct responsibility in overseeing student affairs and services to the students within their respective institutions. Purposive sampling was employed to identify the appropriate head of office in each institution.

The study identified fifteen (15) Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Province of Masbate with institution-level student affairs and services units. All fifteen (15) institutions were invited to participate; eleven (11) HEIs participated in the research, comprising one (1) state university and college (SUC), four (4) local universities and colleges (LUCs) and six (6) from private higher education institutions (PHEIs). The sole SUC represented the entire SUC population in the province, while the participating LUCs and PHEIs provided perspectives from their respective institutional contexts. Four (4) eligible HEIs did not participate and were therefore not included in the final dataset.

Research Instrument Used

Interview guide was utilized to gather primary qualitative data from participant to

obtain in-depth information about their experiences and facilitate meaningful interpretation (Taherdoost, 2021; Taherdoost, 2022). Semi-structured interview was chosen by the researcher for its flexibility, thus, allowing follow-up questions to emerge based on participants' responses and enables the researcher to maintain focus while exploring relevant topics related to the question (Ruslin, et. al., 2022; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). In this method, interviews follow predetermined questions but permit the interviewer to ask additional clarifying questions, enabling a deeper exploration of the respondents' narrated experiences.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher acknowledges the potential influence of positionality on the research process, since the researcher is affiliated with Southern Bicol Colleges, one of the higher education institutions represented in the study. Such positionality was considered throughout participant engagement, interviewing process, transcription, and interpretation of the participants' narratives. The researcher preserved awareness of personal assumption and professional experiences which may affect the interpretation of participants' accounts and grounded the analysis in the participants' experiences. The same semi-structured interview guide was used across participants and follow-up questions were limited to clarifying and exploring information relevant to the research questions.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the conduct of data collection, clearance to proceed had been secured, following the strict protocol in reviewing the comments and suggestions of the research panelists incorporated into the study. Since qualitative data collection often relies on open-ended questions, expert validation has been employed to ensure that the interview guide remains accurate. Communication letter requesting permission to conduct interview was initially sent via email, a physical copy of the letter has been delivered by the researcher personally fostering rapport with the target participants along the visit. Due to province's the island-based

geographical structure, as well as, logistical challenges, one (1) participant was interviewed via phone call (tele-interview). Participants were informed of the nature of the study as well as the use of an audio recording to capture their narratives and were assured of the nature of confidentiality in the research process.

The researcher documented the narratives shared by the participants. Since Masbate is home to diverse linguistic utterances, participants freely switched between English, Filipino, and Minasbate, as well as, Bisaya in some parts of the province during interview, thus, full verbatim (denaturalized) transcription has been employed to capture accurate and authentic presentation of narrated experiences (Bucholtz, 2000; McMullen, 2023). For quotations containing Minasbate, Filipino, or mixed-language expressions, the original wording was retained and accompanied immediately by a precise English translation enclosed in square brackets to ensure accessibility to readers while preserving the participants' linguistic expressions.

Data Saturation

Data saturation was considered in relation to the defined population and the information gathered from the participants' narratives. The study identified fifteen (15) higher education institutions (HEIs) in Masbate with institution-level student affairs and services units. Of these, eleven (11) HEIs participated in the study, representing the institutional contexts available in the province: one (1) State University and College (SUC), four (4) Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs), and six (6) Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). Since there was only one SUC in the province, the category was represented by the sole institution belonging to the institutional type.

Successive interviews were reviewed to determine emerging new information, codes, categories, or thematic insights relevant to the research questions, thus, saturation was assessed through the close examination and comparison of participants' narratives during the data collection and analysis process until further coding is no longer feasible (Guest et. al., 2006; Fusch, P. & Ness, L., 2015). Data collection was

concluded after eleven (11) interviews when the succeeding narratives predominantly reinforced the patterns and themes identified and did not substantially expand the emerging thematic structure.

The four (4) HEIs that which did not participate were not represented in the final dataset; findings reflected the experienced of the participating HEIs rather than as a complete fifteen (15) institution in the province. The finite population of HEIs and the inclusion of representatives from each institutional type were considered in determining the adequacy of the final qualitative dataset.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been employed to systematically identify and organize data into themes to highlight and gain meaningful insights from the narrative shared by participants. This allowed the researcher to understand collective experiences and perspectives, as well as, acknowledge unique meanings found in individual data systems (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness has been established considering careful review and revision of the semi-structured interview guide as suggested by expert validators, as well as the use of both note-taking and audio recording, with participants' permission, to ensure accurate documentation of their narratives. Participants shared narratives were grounded based on the findings in the participants narratives using relevant quotations to support the interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, participants were briefed with the details regarding the purpose, nature and procedures of the study prior to their participation. Their participation was voluntary and confidentiality and privacy were guaranteed. Narratives and other information disclosed were stored and secured properly solely for research purposes. Personal identifiers were excluded from the presentation and reporting of the findings to

protect participants' identities and ensure the confidentiality of their response.

Result and Discussion

This chapter provides the result of the study on the narratives of practitioners in Student Affairs and Services in the higher education institutions in the Province of Masbate. It also involves discussion and interpretation of the data to provide insights into the important results. Using qualitative approach, the study investigated the experiences of SAS practitioners in Masbate in the management if their offices and administration of services to the students. It also involved the problems faced in the different aspects of the profession, as well as, the best practices applied to improve service delivery to students and other stakeholders in their respective institutions.

Experiences of Practitioners in the Management and Administration of Student Affairs and Services

Student affairs professionals play critical roles in higher education and significantly impact students' lives (Schuh et.al, 2017). Consequently, the management of student affairs is a vital process that supports teaching and learning in every higher education institution (Gorak-Sosnowska et al., 2017). After coding the responses into categories, two main themes emerged regarding practitioners' experiences in the management and administration of student affairs: developmentally-inclined management and concerns in SAS management.

Developmentally-inclined Management. This theme covers several key aspects, including policy-driven implementation, collaborative administration, supportive leadership, designated personnel, availability of resources and resource networking, collaboration with stakeholders, and student-driven program implementation. Policy-driven implementation refers to the process of translating the goals and objectives of a policy into concrete actions (Khan, 2016). In accordance with the guidelines set forth by CHED Memorandum Order No. 9, series of 2013 (CMO 9 s. 2013), offices of Student Affairs and Services, along with the programs and services they oversee, adhere

strictly to these stipulated guidelines. Beyond compliance with the CMO, the vision, mission, and goals of the institution are also considered essential in effectively implementing student services.

P1_SAS, a participant with four (4) years in the students' affairs and services stated: I ensure the effective management and administration of Student Affairs and Services by implementing school policies, approved SAS programs, projects, activities, and initiatives that promote student welfare, development, and institutional student programs and services. Our student-centered approach aligns with the institution's Vision, Mission, and Quality Policy, adhering to CHED Memorandum Order No. 9, series of 2013, which provides guidelines for student affairs and services in higher education institutions.

In addition, adherence to the CMO 40 s. 2008 - Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education (MORPHE) served as guide for the private higher education institutions in the province of Masbate. As mentioned by P10_SAS, a man in his early thirties:

P10_SAS, male in early thirties: ...the Manual of Operations that are customized to fit the needs of the institution and students as well. In our organizational structure the OSAS is under the VPAA.

Further reliance on the policy, particularly the guidelines of CMO 9 s. 2013 – Enhanced Policies and Guidelines on Student Affairs and Services and CMO 8 s. 2021 – Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Delivery of Student Affairs and Services (SAS) Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic was emphasized by P10_SAS.

P10_SAS, male in his early thirties: I rely primarily on the CMO 9 s. 2013 and CMO 8 s. 2021 for the enhanced policies and guidelines during the COVID-19 Pandemic which is still applicable today as we live with the new normal.

Abiding by the policies and guidelines stated by the national authority, as well as,

aligning the services and programs to the established vision and mission of the institution results to a more effective and successful as Carreno (2024), in a professional practice discussion, emphasized that “aligning program initiatives with overarching organizational goals optimizes resources, streamlines communication, and ensures that transformation efforts directly contribute to strategic objectives.” This further leads to the efficiency of service and focused on the achievement of long-term goals as envisioned by the institution and expected by the national governing authority such as CHED.

Collaboration among individuals makes the job done as Mendez (2023) concluded that “managerial actions that promote collaboration activities predict higher organizational performance levels measured as fiscal performance and outcomes in a specific policy such as education”. This is related to the type of management employed by SAS Heads by collaborating to successfully finish a task or goal.

P5_SAS, female in late twenties: We administer services like academic advising, counseling, extracurricular activities, and student organizations. Collaboration is the key, as we work closely with faculty, administration and students to make sure that every student has access to the support they need. Our approach is hands-on and personal, making it easier to provide the level of care that our student deserved in a smaller community.

Due to the demand of teamwork in the practice of student affairs, smaller schools tap the assistance of faculty members to perform better services to the student community. According to Syno, et al. (2023), collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals is an important means of increasing student success.

P6_SAS male in early forties: Didi po sa student affairs namon, we give advices to students and ask the instructors to work cooperatively sa accomplishment of goals and objectives in the school. [*Our student affairs here give advices to students and ask instructors to work cooperatively in the accomplishment of our goals and objectives in the school*]

Along with collaborating with instructors and other staff in the institution, students, particularly, those student leaders serving as role-models among the student community were tapped to do tasks related to student affairs.

As P7_SAS, female in early seventies, puts it: I work hand in hand with the student council *kay nata-tap ko sinda kag madali ko man ma-tap sinda kay naga-visit man sinda saak-on. Yana ko lang ini na impose kay gina-mandate ko gayud na magkadi sinda* during their vacant time *lang*, communication becomes smooth because of that, anyway, ang activities namon for the good of the students. *[I work hand in hand with the student council because I can tap them, and I find them easy to tap because they visit my office. I had just imposed this because I mandated them to come during their vacant time only, communication becomes smooth because of that, anyway, our activities are for the good of the students.]*

Findings in the study of Commodore et al. (2018) addressed the ways in which coordination and collaboration – between academic affairs and student affairs – aid in fostering students' success, retention, and degree attainment, thus, are particularly relevant for under-resourced environments and argue that bringing the administrative functions of academic affairs and students affairs together provides a greater understanding among faculty and staff, and engenders a more nurturing and supportive environment for students.

Tosun and Bozkurt Bostanci (2024) indicate significant positive relationships between teachers' perceptions of organizational support, perceptions of administrative support, and their levels of leadership.

P7_SAS, female in early seventies: I also inform the administration and I am thankful that they are becoming aware of the procedures of SAS.

P8_SAS, female in late thirties: *Si maam director naman namon, minsan naga sabi ina siya na: "dili maso-solve an problem kun dili gayud mag buruligan" kay an motto ni maam: "buruligan gayud an kada usad". [Our maam director, on the other hand, sometimes she would say: "problems will not*

be solved if we do not help one another" because her motto is: "helping one another"]

When examining whether administrative support mediated the impact of organizational support on teacher leadership, significant effects were observed on the paths connecting organizational support, administrative support, and teacher leadership (Tosun & Bozkurt Bostanci, 2024). According to Yidana et al. (2023), administrative support provides service to the students, faculty and other stakeholders, thus, assistances provided constitutes the over-all well-being of the institution.

Designated personnel for every service rendered by the office of student affairs and services served as pivotal in the general performance of the organization. Manahan (2019) mentioned that management of student personnel services is one of the essential components in every educational institution to make it successful in the full implementation of its visions, missions and goals.

As P10_SAS, male in early thirties, puts it: In our organizational structure the OSAS in under the VPAA, with one (1) office staff, three (3) SAS officers – one (1) in charge of sports development, another one (1) for career development and alumni and one (1) for student activities and organizations. So yes, we have designated individuals specifically to work on the SAS in our school. There are two-unit heads under my care – guidance with two (2) guidance staff. Aside from that we have a prefect of discipline and two (2) discipline officers and one (1) office staff.

Having other personnel do their respective jobs under the scope of the student affairs makes programs and services efficient. The different services being offered to students provide satisfaction and help them achieve their goals in the institution. Furthermore, excellent management of student personnel services inspires other stakeholders to continue support and patronize the institution as the second home of their children (Manahan, 2019).

Resource management in student affairs play a vital role also in the student affairs and services. Acido and Kilongkilong (2022) argued

that proper management of resources is a vital obligation. Academic leaders must not only make use of limited resources, but also align their resource management approach with the institutions' goals and objectives.

P2_SAS, in female in late twenties: We focus on important events like orientation, acquaintance party, sports fests, promoting an inclusive environment, disaster preparedness, mental health support, and outreach programs. To make the most of our resources, we also work with government agencies and private companies.

Also, a participant highlighted available resources which takes parts in their effective implementation of programs for students.

As P11_SAS, male in late thirties, puts it: *Sa resources wara kami problema kaayo kay siyudad man dapit ang school. We have a covered court also to implement our programs. [We do not have a problem with resources because the school is near the town. We have a covered court also to implement our programs.]*

Further, another participant underscored the importance of having materials and other resources in their offices instead of borrowing materials from the administration and other colleges:

P7_SAS, female in early seventies: In terms of resources, actually we have our own speaker and projector, laptops and other resources, *para dili kami san kakahuram sa administration kay mapagal mag surat san letter. [In terms of resources, actually we have our own speaker and projector, laptops and other resources, so that we do not need to borrow from the administration because it is such a hassle writing [formal] letter.]*

Collaboration with stakeholders has been held true by some participants as way for them to maximize the implementation of programs and services. Ali and Haapasalo (2023) suggested that collaboration is a multilevel process of active engagement of multiple stakeholders, they must have a high degree of shared understanding in terms of cooperation, control and

coordination to achieve the mutually desired outcomes.

P6_SAS, male in early forties: *Sa finances namon, amo po gayud ang 'big problem' namon kaya naga-seek kami san sponsorship sa mga agencies, barangays... [Our finances, truly, is our big problem so we seek sponsorship to agencies and barangays].*

Likewise, a participant mentioned their community involvement incorporating collaboration with authorities in the implementation of seminars and conferences.

P10_SAS, male in early thirties: In terms of community involvement and partnership, we rely on the existence of NSTP *kasi [because]* aside from being the director for SAS I am also the NSTP Director.

Kaya [Hence], I make sure that we have a strong partnership, and also with the other colleges, we make sure that we develop programs for our extension services like adopting a barangay, seminars on public safety, tapping the PNP, for drugs *naman [also]*, we extend with the community tapping PNP pa rin *[still]* for information on war on drugs *mga gano'n. [something like that.]*

This practice in student affairs ensures effectiveness in the management aspect by looking for solutions and involving community stakeholders in the implementation of programs and services for the benefit of the students.

Student affairs practitioners, as well as, researchers were well positioned to contribute holistically to student success, as such, they could play strategic roles in the transformation of higher education. The study of January (2023), illustrated that a key strategic objective of student affairs is to contribute significantly towards student success.

P9_SAS, female in early thirties: My emphasis is on creating a supportive environment in which students can flourish academically, personally, and professionally. Such an approach begins with identifying the varying needs of the student population through routine assessments and feedback

mechanisms. Programs and services are designed and implemented around the information gathered so that they might meet the specific needs-student academic support, career counseling, mental health, and extracurricular activities.

Providing services centered on the welfare of students is providing an avenue for students' holistic development inside the campus as they traverse to the real-world after they graduated from their chosen degree programs.

Concerns in SAS Management. This theme include concerns such as limited personnel, facilities and resources are incurred by some student affairs and services in their respective higher education institutions. In the study of Haley (2022), staff interactions were assessed in an exploration of students' experiences within the student affairs contexts, thus, revealed that students attribute different benefits to their interactions with staff (e.g., staff availability) compared with their experiences with offices, programs, and functional areas (e.g., skill and professional development). Hence, limitations in terms of staff of student affairs affects students' perception and the performance of the organization. One respondent disclosed her experience as a sole practitioner in the implementation student affairs:

P5_SAS, female in early thirties: *Ako lang po ang naga-manage san OSAS po. Naga-collab po ako sa mga admin, faculty and students sa pag-manage and implement san projects. [I am the only one managing the OSAS. I collaborate with the administration, faculty and students as we manage and implement projects.]*

This is also declared by another participant, as instructors are assigned in other units such as in their clinic and library.

As P6_SAS, male in early forties, claimed: I handle the entire SAS, so far, I do not have any specific personnel to handle other services, only the teachers *pati sa [even in]* library and clinic.

However, difficulty with tapping other faculty and staff was disclosed by another

respondent and that approval from the mother school takes precedence.

P11_SAS, male in early forties, claimed: Sa [About] human resource, well I have difficulty in collaboration with faculty and administration because here, in every transaction, programs or any activities we need to ask approval from the mother school.

Limited number of facilities also hampered the implementation of services as claimed by some participants.

As P3_SAS, male, in late twenties: Challenges *talaga namin* is *yung* facilities, buildings *namin kulang*, chairs *kasi yun talaga yung mga* main problem *namin. Kasi kahit nangangako naman yung LGU namin, kahit papano nabibigyan din naman pero talagang kulang pa rin kasi minsan sa labas nalang kami nagpapaklase lalo na tuwing lunes. [Our challenge is the facilities, buildings are limited, the chairs that is our main problem. Even though the LGU promises, somehow, we are given [assistance] but still it does not compensate to the deficiencies, sometimes, we hold our classes outside during Mondays.*

Limitations to the accessible resources also appeared to be one of the concerns behind the implementation of student affairs and services.

P4_SAS, male in early thirties: One of the problems or challenges in our institution is the lack of available technological resources such as laptops, computers and printer. Some students do not really have access to such technologies considering their status also. The college is funded by the LGU but sometimes we were not given priority in terms of appropriations, budgets and funds.

Physical facilities provide adequate and conducive environment for learning, modern physical facilities are important and have positive effects on students learning and performance (Shami & Hussain, 2005; Yangambi, 2023). Yangambi (2023) highlighted several important observations that are critical to determining that school infrastructures have a

serious impact on student learning and achievement. School facilities are a major factor in ensuring quality education, therefore, continuous improvement of the infrastructure should be part of the development plans crafter by the administration and other stakeholders such as LGUs directly governing the higher education institution.

Challenges of Student Affairs and Services Practitioners in the Practice of their Profession

In the study of Rupande (2016), student affairs professionals were overwhelmed by various challenges in their day-to-day activities. Student affairs practitioners faced challenges related to character formation, violation of institutional policies, student retention and limited time are among the challenges on surface with deeply rooted causes. This section discusses the challenges and highlighted the components in the conduct of student affairs and services, such as: (a) Student Development Services, (b) Student Welfare Services and (c) Institutional Student Programs and Services.

Student Development Services

In terms of Student Development Services, three (3) themes emerged as challenges concerned with Student Development Services such as: concerns in development programs and services for students' development, limited students' organization and students' sense of commitment.

Concerns in Development Programs and Services for Students' Development. As experienced by some SAS practitioners in the higher education institutions, budget constraints or limited funding affected implementation of leadership programs, extra-curricular activities, off-campus and other events.

P1_SAS, female in early forties: ... budget constraints affect the implementation of leadership training, career development programs, and student participation in off-campus activities, particularly for international travel.

This is supported by P2_SAS, female in late twenties: Limited funding also makes it

hard to provide leadership training, and extracurricular activities.

Further claimed by P6_SAS, male in early forties: *Pinaka-problem po namon [Our main problem]* is financial issues of students affect their incapability to participate in the events in the school leading to poor participation rate.

Likewise, the lack of institutionalized programs for students' development takes a toll in ensuring the holistic development of students in the higher education environment.

Claimed by P9_SAS, female in early thirties: *Ina po, gina-planuhan pa po namon ina, sa yana wara pa po. Kay 1 year pa man lang ako sa OSAS. [About that, we are still planning about that, for now, not yet, since this is my first in the OSAS]*

Further supported by the statement of P11_SAS, male in late forties: The challenge I encountered in terms of Student Development Services generally includes Crisis Management like handling student-related emergencies, such as conflicts, safety concerns and disciplinary concerns. Since we need to ask approval from the mother school, we have difficulty in attracting students to leadership programs, training and extracurricular activities.

Lack of funding or limited financial capacity for the various activities was also a challenge to student affairs. Friedberg (1998) in Rupande (2016), expressed that student affairs funding should be multifaceted and must include significant institutional support. On the other hand, development leadership in students is part of the merit of higher education institutions (Skalicky et al., 2018) as they become part of the larger community as they graduate from the institution. Meanwhile, Crutchfield (2020) posited that by balancing academic knowledge with other areas of knowledge, with a heightened sense of community and mental and emotional well-being, higher education can cultivate students who apply their skills with reduced stress, a sense of belonging, and freedom of expression.

Limited Number of Student Organizations. Student organizations or associations in higher education's institutions aid in providing an experience that cannot be offered by classroom lectures and curricular activities. It offers networking among other peers in and out the campus and extends cultural beliefs and academic ideals as they part with associations. Lack of which can be a concern for the student affairs and services practitioner.

P3_SAS: *Dati meron kaming ... Knights and ... Women's Club yan nga lang di na nagfunction ng maayos kaya yun tinanggal nalang namin sa roster. [Before we have Knights and Womens Club, but then, since they no longer function effectively, we removed them in the roster.]*

P8_SAS: Supreme Student Council (SSC) *lang po wara na po kami san iba na organization. [Only Supreme Student Council (SSC), we do not have any other organization]*

The study of Smith and Chenoweth (2015) showed that students who were engaged in extracurricular student organizations rated themselves higher on both leadership traits and behaviors than those who were not involved in student organizations. Extracurricular activities contribute to well-rounded education by allowing students to apply academic knowledge, reinforce classroom learning, self-expression, skills development and cultivate leadership, as well as, interpersonal skills. Student organizations offer one opportunity for students to identify and test their leadership abilities (Sumague, 2023).

Students' Sense of Commitment. This theme involves the students' involvement and participation in activities and organizations, thus, committing oneself to task in the organizational level or in the group during extracurricular activities. Student affairs and services practitioners find this as a concern in the involvement of students in different activities.

P1_SAS: ... when encouraging students to actively engage in extracurricular and co-curricular activities can be challenging, especially due to academic workload and

personal commitments *na hindi naman natin mapilit [we cannot compel them]*

P2_SAS: ... challenges like divisions between students from different programs, which create tension making it hard to organize activities that involves teamwork. Many students show little interest on activities especially for seminars, and some join only for attendance points rather than real involvement.

P3_SAS: Student engagement and participation also is another issue because those who are academically inclined do not have the motivation to join the extra-curricular activities.

P10_SAS: Generally, one challenge I have encountered. After the pandemic, students are not well-versed in the operations of how a school operates for tertiary level education *kasi di'ba [because, you know] they had this modular learning modality. Even after the pandemic until now we still encounter students who are not oriented of the college life. Sometimes, they take these organizations as pabibo lang [clout chasing], but they are officers in the different organizations, the challenge is their commitment to their roles and responsibilities as an officer or member of the organization. Ugwa man san mga [There are also those] brilliant and committed but mostly is how to let them realize kun nano man ang inda ginsulod na responsibilidad [as to what responsibilities had they enlisted in].*

Christison (2013) stated that participation in extracurricular activities positively correlates with students' development both academically and personally. Hence, participation in extracurricular activities is associated with improved leadership, time management and community involvement. Benefits for students to commit to the extracurricular activities is found in the study of King et al. (2020) where over one-third of participants involved in extracurricular activities felt that the majority of those activities aided them in being successful. It is recommended for universities to

encourage and support student clubs and activities as a way of creating community, while offering opportunities for their skills development (King et al. 2020).

Student Welfare Services

In terms of Student Welfare Services, four (4) themes emerged as challenges, such as: Availability of effective guidance and counseling service, students' campus welfare, awareness students' rights inside the campus and absence of other student welfare services.

Availability of Effective Guidance and Counselling Service. Guidance and counselling are services under the student affairs which caters to the well-functioning of individuals to utilize their full potential and design interventions to facilitate positive change to students' behavior. However, challenges in this aspect were experienced by student affairs and services practitioners.

P1_SAS: the recommended ratio of 1:1000 (Registered Guidance Counselor to students) is difficult. Although there is an existing plantilla position for one RGC, no applicants have filled the position to date *kaya* challenge *yan* for us.

P8_SAS: *Sa guidance naman, ako po ang naga hawid bisan dili man ako licensed, amo po ini ang concern sani na gamay na school kay minsan dili gayud maiwasan na "slash-slash" gayud. Bale finance officer "slash" OSAS "slash" guidance counsellor... [In the guidance, I handle this section even if I am not licensed, this is one of the concerns of a small school because we cannot avoid the "slash-slash".]*

P10_SAS: Since this is a big institution and you cannot expect small cases with this number of students; you can expect a daily visit from students and teaching and non-teaching staff na they really would come here and report cases. The challenge is how to treat these cases *cautiously kasi minsan na o-overwhelm sa sunod-sunod na* [because sometimes it's overwhelming when there are consecutive] visits. *Kaya stressful, basta stressful.* My staff can attest to that.

P11_SAS: Since we don't have Guidance Counselor, addressing student mental health issues while ensuring proper counseling and support resources are also challenging to me as a SAS Coordinator.

Section 14 of the CHED Memorandum Order 9 s. 2013 highlighted the functions of the guidance and counselling services in the higher education institutions. "Gender sensitive individual and group counselling shall be provided by a licensed counselor. The acceptable ration of counselor to student population is at least 1:1000". Further stipulated in Section 7 of the R. A. 9258 or the Guidance and Counselling Act of 2004 stated that: "No person shall (a) engage in the practice of guidance and counseling without a valid Certificate of Registration and the valid Professional Identification Card or a special permit; (b) make representations to the public or to third person as a licensed Guidance Counselor during the time that the licensed has been revoked or suspended, and, (c) allow anybody to use his/her license as guidance counselor to enable such unqualified individual to engage in the practice of guidance and counseling." However, Cervantes (2018) pointed out that guidance facilitators in the Philippines usually do not hold the qualifications of a guidance counselor. Due to the shortage of registered guidance counselors (RGCs) in the Philippines, guidance facilitators from various fields often assume counseling-related roles despite lacking formal RGC qualifications.

Students' Campus Welfare. Students while inside the campus must walk around the vicinity free from harm and satisfied. In universities, the services include but are not limited to catering, guidance and counseling, sports and recreation and health care services (Sadera, et al. 2022). However, challenges in the campus emerge as emphasized by participants:

P2_SAS: While for Student welfare services, we struggle on not having a stay in health personnel, making it difficult to provide immediate medical help when students need it. In emergencies, we still have to call 911/MDRRMO or BFP for assistance.

P4_SAS: As for student welfare, financial challenges with our students are a thing. 50% of the enrollees are financially incapable. Some cannot spend so much money for doing activities because of that, *mas gustuhon pa ninda na igastos* [they would rather spend it for] their fare and snacks.

RP 9: *Sa health talaga ... health services. Like, may nahihimatay, may nangyayari talaga na nahihimatay, lalo na ang past years na grabe po talaga ang init ng classroom tapos sige pa'n brownout kaya may mga students talaga kami na nahihimatay na. Kasi palagi silang on-leave, kaya palagi namin silang dinadala sa barangay clinic. Pero syempre ... iba pa rin ang may school clinic. [About health, health services. Like, some would faint, there are instances that somebody would faint, especially in the past year due to the extreme heat inside the classroom and consistent power interruptions, there were students who would faint. Because they are always on-leave, that is why we always brought them to barangay clinics. Of course ... it's different when there is a school clinic, that is why, we take them via tricycle]*

The school administration has the responsibility to provide the best learning environment to students and to make this possible, there is a need for an efficient and effective delivery of student services. Administrators are concerned that by delivering effective student services, state colleges, and universities need the call of the national government in its effort to develop the country as a whole (Ludeman, 2002; Amit, 2019). As HEIs provide access to quality education, to cater the needs of the students inside the campus is also vital to foster students' well-being.

Students' Rights Inside the Campus. Salazar (2019) asserted the primary purpose of the student handbook is to provide students with information, guidelines, and policies that will enhance their adjustments as part of the community of their school. One of the key documents that outline the students experience is the Student Handbook, it defines the institution as a community where students share common

interests, navigate cultural diversity and value personal and professional identity. IN addition, the handbook provides guidance to students as they walkthrough in the university and absence of such manual leads to unawareness of the rules and policies encompassing the institution, as well as the services that students can avail while staying in the corners of the institution.

P6_SAS: *Wara po kami san* [We do not have a] Student manual. Rules and processes are only posted in the bulletin board *po bale didto po kami naga post san mga* [that is where we post some] information, announcements.

While there may be an existing scheme for the dissemination of policy and rules within the campus, student manuals or handbooks still contain policies that students must learn and abide by during their time in the campus environment. Parents, students and other members of the school community must also be actively involved in school discipline policy development to ensure that such rules and regulations are co-owned (Tinapay & Tirol, 2022).

Absence of Other Student Welfare Services. Supporting wellbeing is now central to the realization of children's rights, evidenced by an expanding literature linking children's participation and their wellbeing (Anderson and Graham, 2015). However, absence on some parts of the policy stipulated by the Commission on Higher Education signified another matter:

P3_SAS: Yung career guidance, na open na yan sa akin ni Maam kaya pinag-iisipan pa namin ang paraan kung paano gagawin. Yung mga IGP naman sa mga students wala kami noon, hindi siya practiced dito sa college, pati yung sa services for persons with disability. (*Career guidance has been proposed and planning is underway, income generating projects (IGP) and services for students who belong to persons with disability is not practiced.*)

Student well-being emerged as a critical educational agenda, hence, becoming a priority in educational policy and practice, efforts to

measure and monitor it have increased, along with the number of proposed student well-being domains (Hossain, O'Neill, & Strnadová, 2023). Prioritizing other services related to student welfare enhances institutional support, ultimately improving the quality of education and student outcomes.

Institutional Student Programs and Services

In terms of Institutional Student Programs and Services, three (3) themes emerged as challenges, such as: concerns for provisions of inclusive environment, issues in the students' programs and SAS management factor.

Concerns for Provisions of Inclusive Environment. Davis et al. (2020) fostering a campus environment that promotes student success is crucial to fulfilling community colleges' mission to provide access and opportunity for economic mobility for their students. However, some institutions cannot implement these provisions because of some inadequacies:

P1_SAS: providing accessible facilities and inclusive services for students with disabilities and special needs requires further development and additional funding.

P4_SAS: In terms of special needs, that is another concern, we do not have any program for special needs.

Ensuring inclusivity among learners and experienced in the learning environment fulfills the mission of the institution for quality and accessibility to the existing programs, as well as the prospected ones. Whitmer (2021) claimed each learner brings their own unique lived experience, multi-level intersectionality, and cognitive and social learning variabilities to their educational journey many of these present obstacles to their realizing successful learning outcomes, thus, understanding the lived experiences in the learner's journey and creating environments that remove barriers to learning requires a deep understanding of inclusion.

Issues in the Student Programs. Safety and security are of the most important factors students in the higher education level aspire.

Huang et al. (2022) concluded that environmental cues associated with the risk of crime victimization (e.g. lack of natural surveillance) are more often linked to poorer safety perceptions than those linked to the risk of traffic conditions. Inspections of campus environments using physical and personal becomes an integral part of sustainability planning among universities.

P1_SAS: ...ensuring a safe and secure campus environment requires continuous strengthening of policies *sa mga [among] students, yung disaster preparedness measures, and compliance with government standards challenge po yan sa amin [that is a challenge here]*.

P3_SAS: Actually, from the barangay *kasi sa-kop kami ng barangay, pero hindi sila everyday na nagbabantay. ... tsaka yung kudal tapos gate talagang wala pa, kaya masyado pa kaming open dito kaya dati may klase kami di mga six PM hanggang 7PM pero itinanggal namin kasi yun na delikado para sa mga student kasi wala pa kami safety and security masyado talaga na established. [Actually, since we are within the scope of the barangay but they are not always safeguarding [the campus]. Also, our facilities, walls and gate are not yet constructed. Before we have classes here 6PM until 7PM but we amended the schedule due to the risk for students since we still have not established safety and security.]*

The use of CCTV or closed-circuit television had been disclosed by one (1) participant due to the absence of security guard in the campus.

P6_SAS: Safety and security is enforced with CCTVs as you can see *po wara kami security guard [... we do not have a security guard]. Yun lang, may power-delay system man an amon CCTVs, tas naga-generator nalang gayud para functional gihapon [However, our CCTV has a power-delay system, and we use power generator so it can be functional again].*

Students' engagement and on-time compliance of required documents to be submitted to

the office of student affairs and services and other offices were identified as challenges by other respondents as it causes delays in the preparation and submission of reports to even higher authorities such as CHED and other organizations offering scholarships.

P4_SAS: I think the balance between promoting students' curricular activities and academic activities is something I would really address, *kasi dun lang talaga ako nahihirapan [because that is really a challenge]. Kasi* sometimes they need to prioritize first their academic performances or success *kaya nahihirapan kami [we find it challenging]* when joining events.

P5_SAS: ...it's also challenging to keep students consistently engage in extracurricular activities, as they sometimes prioritize their academic responsibilities.

P10_SAS: *Kasi* their compliances to the rules and documents that needs submission, we actually have some concerns there because they have these delays. The clout culture is something we do not really appreciate because of this we encountered delays in the submission, *walang commitment sa tasks [no commitment to tasks]* leading to just forgetting about it or not really committed to it.

Another issue is the limited opportunity to avail scholarship grants, as disclosed by one (1) participant:

P3_SAS: Sa institutional students' programs and services *naman*, sa scholarship is *meron kaming [we have]* school financial assistance from LGU *tsaka yung mga [also]* financial assistance *din* from political parties and politicians. *Pero, yun nga lang* limited *lang yung* students *na nakaka-avail* so *paunahan lang [But, there is a limited number to the students who can avail so 'first-come, first-serve' basis only.]*

According to Johnson et al. (2022), university student support services facilitate student performance, contribute to students' success, and increase students' chances of degree completion. Student support services programs'

success depends on students' help-seeking behavior. However, issues and concerns in student programs under the student affairs and service leads to inadequacies in the efficiency of service which causes concerns in the future.

SAS Management Factors. Despite its the support and the guidelines in the institutional programs and services component postulated in CMO 9 s. 2013, factors affecting management of student affairs and services emerged such as limitations in funding and personnel specifically assigned for the different programs.

P5_SAS: Developing and maintaining institutional programs that engage students effectively can be difficult due to limited budget and lack of staff. It's hard for us to make choices about which programs to prioritize.

P8_SAS: *Gina-develop pa po namon ang kadamuan sa mga institutional development programs po. Kay si institution po pano paka-hire ginapabayaan na ninda ang instructor mag-mobilize kag mag-grow, niyan pag naghali ang instructor wara naman san personnel na ma-handle didto. Ma bag-o naman, ma adjust naman, kaya malisud ang implementation sani na mga programs kaya gina-develop pa namon kun nano an best way para sani. [We are still developing most of our institutional development programs. In our institution, once instructors are hired, they just let them mobilize and grow, but, when they resigned, no one can handle the task assigned. Amendments and adjustments will occur eventually, the implementation is challenging for these programs, that is why we are still developing, seeking for the best way for this.]*

Due to financial constraints and lack of personnel handling other programs in the office of student affairs, delivery of services was at stake. Buban and Janer (2022) recommended that institutions may look into the possibility of hiring additional SAS personnel and giving them appropriate trainings and seminars to make the program delivery more effective and efficient and strengthen linkages to help students avail different kinds of support. Arangote

(2018) recommended that personnel handling services such as multi-faith, scholarship, housing and residential, food service, special needs and others be prioritized to promote well-being in their walks of life in the college institution.

Solutions to Address Problems or Best Practices in the implementation of Student Affairs and Services

Andrews (2024) identified strategies for improving student retention, throughput and graduation through well-designed service-learning programs including aligning activities with education and course objectives, providing practical community-based experiences, maintaining collaboration with community partners and integrating reflection through discussion and presentations among others. Effective implementation also requires training and support, attention to legal and ethical considerations, and continuous monitoring, assessment and evaluation at various levels.

After coding the responses into categories, the emerging themes related to solutions for challenges and best practices in student affairs and services include improving the holistic development of students and improving SAS practices and management.

Improving Holistic Development of Students. Holistic development refers to the responsibility of higher education institutions to create programs and policies that promote the development of students in different aspects (Loyola, 2022). Student support practices aimed at holistic development had been stated by respondents:

P1_SAS: To encourage participation, we implement incentive programs such as awarding certificates and recognition to active student leaders and participants. Also, in the absence of a Registered Guidance Counselor, we designate Guidance Coordinators per college and train Peer Facilitators among students to provide basic support and assistance, and we work closely with industries, businesses, and professional organizations to offer skills training, internship placements, career coaching, and job

fairs to enhance student employability and align competencies with industry demands.

P4_SAS: Since we have students who are talented, and skilled in some aspects, sometimes when we have fiestas in barangay and municipal events students coming from our institution are invited to perform and that way, we ensure a collaboration with other agencies strengthening our bond. Another is sometimes I do room-to-room to monitor their uniform, ID and haircut, dress code – formal attire.

P10_SAS: ... specialized student organizations that caters to the needs of the student – community, we have school-based DRRM and we tap them during activities and we provide bi-annual trainings by tapping agencies for their training to make sure that they are well-trained so that they can deliver effectively and efficiently in the future.

Using guidelines from other agencies such as the Department of Education's DO 55 series of 2013 or the reiteration of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) on R.A. 10627 or the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 had been revealed by a respondent to be effective as implemented in the college level:

P6_SAS: We use the guidelines of DEPED on bullying and positive discipline, since we only have few students, we do not have any problem in terms of implementing discipline because we only have a few numbers of students.

Likewise, gender sensitivity within the campus was also deemed as best practice as stated by respondents:

P10_SAS: We promote also LGBTQIA+, we have our GAD focal personnel ... *hinay-hinay naton gina-insert ang [gradually inserting] GAD practice sa aton [in our] programs like halimbawa ginatugutan naton mag cross-dress ang [like for example, we allow cross-dressing among] members of LGBT but for me, for them to not be subjected to bullying: "that if you look like a man, dress like a man, if you look like a woman, dress like a woman". I would advise them, since*

kami lang din ang naga-release san [we are releasing] uniform. But, if you are really comfortable with that and if they encounter bullying, we are here, the guidance services, to support their mental health. Di na man din kami naga [we no longer use] “master or lady of ceremony”. Even in our wording we insert gender sensitivity like: “ladies and gentlemen and all genders in between”,

Moreover, in adherence to the mandates of inclusive education, programs and guidelines were set by some higher education institutions (HEIs) to accommodate persons with disability, as stated:

P10_SAS: We implement a scholarship program for all PWDs where they avail a 100% free tuition fee, and we also give them assistance for mobility *ni piso wala silang babayaran [they will not pay a penny]*, and they are prioritized *sa TES kasi nasa guidelines po yan ng UNIFAST*. We make sure that the PWD certification is attached in their application. Tuition fee is free including miscellaneous and other school fees. *Hang-gat nag-aaral sila [As long as they study], free ang tuition fee nila.*

The concept of holistic development, and wellness of students is very clear as a reference or foundation in the practice of student affairs and services. Majority, if not all, student affairs and services administrators and practitioners have prioritized the total development of students through the various programs and activities that they institute in their respective HEIs (Loyola, 2022). These best practices not only aided in the well-being of the students in the campus life, but also promoted their rights, aspirations and supported their dreams to finish college as they become part of the community workforce.

Improving SAS Practices and Management. Student affairs professionals are increasingly expected to assess and evaluate programs that support student success (Fallucca, 2018 in Fernandez et al. 2022). Assessment and evaluation work is important for gathering data to improve practice and support students. ACPA and NASPA, have called upon student affairs

professionals to use assessment and evaluation practices in ways that are culturally relevant and that support the ethics and values of the profession. To address the challenges and promote best practices in the practice of student affairs, the following responses underscored the best ways to improve the management of student affairs and services in their respective institutions:

P1_SAS: ...we collaborate with external organizations, government agencies, and partner HEIs to secure funding, sponsorships, and collaborations for leadership training, career development programs, and student participation in off-campus activities. We also collaborate with the Philippine Disability Affairs Office to explore additional support services. Through these initiatives, the OSAS continues to improve its services, ensuring that students receive holistic support for their academic success, personal development, and overall well-being.

P5_SAS: In terms of Student Welfare Services, we started to have partnership or work closely with the local mental health professionals to offer counseling services. We also conduct symposium about mental health in order for the student to be aware, reduce stigma and connect people with support.

Another respondent also highlighted on the importance of seeking sponsorship from external sources such as the barangay LGU:

P6_SAS: We seek sponsorship from agencies and the LGU. *Halimbawa sa mga barangay like “Kap, kun ma sponsor ka po saamon, ma-offer po kami free services, like an amon school band pwede niyo po gamiton if you have events or festivals” kaya maganda gayud kun may network ka sa iba na institutions na dili ka gina diri-an kay aram ninda na safe man pud na mabalik. [We seek sponsorships from agencies and the LGU. Example in the barangay, we ask the barangay captain that if they will be one of our sponsors, we will also offer free services like our school band (drum and bugle) can be used during events or festivals, that is why, it is*

good to have a good network with other institutions who will not refuse because they are sure about its safe return.]

Yue (2024) underscored that evaluation and continuous improvement are key to enhancing management levels. Regular evaluation and feedback identify issues and summarize experiences, continually optimizing processes and services. Assessing best practices and improving services for the students as they complete their degrees and become well-rounded individuals in the future workplace is an inevitable aspect of being a students' affairs practitioner and is one of the most important parts of a students' college experience.

Findings

Student Affairs and Services (SAS) practitioners experienced both effective management of students support services and challenges in service implementation. Policy-driven initiatives that translated institutional goals and objectives into actionable strategies, and a collaborative administration involving faculty and staff contributing to efficient service delivery were among the effective management practices. Supportive administrative structures, as well as, designated personnel assisting the service implementation facilitated smooth operations in the practice of the profession and provided for effective service.

The availability of institutional resources enhanced operational efficiency, and further resource networking significantly strengthened student services. Strategic advantage through collaboration between SAS and community stakeholders improved overall service effectiveness. Student-driven programs empowered students and fostered their active engagement within institutions adhering with the objectives of higher education.

Inevitable challenges emerged despite effective management which strengthened service delivery. Overwhelming workloads and numerous responsibilities were observed due to limited personnel handling SAS programs. Constraints in facilities and resources hindered service implementation, leading to backlogs that affected students throughout their college experience.

Specific challenges also emerged in students support services, particularly, in the following academic support services. Budget constraints, limited funding and a lack of student organizations – in the case of Student Development Services, affected student engagement displayed through low commitment and participation in programs and activities. In Student Welfare Services, concerns arose regarding the availability of effective guidance and counseling, campus safety, students' rights awareness, and the absence of structured welfare programs. In Student Welfare Services, concerns arose regarding the availability of effective guidance and counseling, campus safety, student rights awareness, and the absence of structure welfare programs. Institutional Student Programs and Service faced issues related to inclusivity, safety and security, compliance with reporting requirements, restricted access to scholarship grants, funding limitation, and insufficient personnel to manage student programs effectively.

SAS practitioners implemented solutions, as well as, best practices to improve holistic student development and enhanced SAS management. Initiatives employed to support holistic student development included incentivizing participation through certificates, creation of specialized organizations to cater student needs which, also, fostered skill and talent development. Promotion of LGBTQIA+ and gender sensitivity in the campus and other programs, as well as, scholarship grants for persons with disabilities (PWDs), thus, prioritizing them for other financial aid programs were also among the initiatives employed to foster holistic development among students. Peer facilitators can help address counseling issues, in-person monitoring, including room-to-room checks around the campus were also helpful in addressing institutional discipline policies. Bullying and positive discipline, in adherence with DepEd guidelines, strengthened student affairs initiatives.

Efforts to improve SAS management included collaboration with external organization, government agencies and partner HEIs. Practitioners strengthened partnership with mental health professionals, conducted awareness programs, and sought LGU support for

student initiatives, while sharing institutional resources, such as drum and bugles for parade and festivals, with local government to foster sustainable and mutually beneficial student services.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, some Student Affairs and Services (SAS) practitioners in the Province of Masbate managed their offices by employing the most appropriate approaches in administering programs and services in adherence with the CHED Memorandum Order 9 s. 2013 or the Enhanced Policies and Guidelines for Student Affairs and Services. Other SAS Practitioners maximized the available human resources, including faculty members and non-teaching staff to provide academic support to relieve the limitations in personnel. Other practitioners benefited from a supportive administration which facilitated the smooth delivery of services and ensured the presence of sufficient and competent personnel in supervising student affairs and services within their institutions.

Challenges persisted despite these advantages because some practitioners endure with shortages in personnel, resources and facilities which hindered the delivery of student support that students deserved, thus, addressing these concerns requires the engagement of stakeholders, administrators and education-related agencies to ensure that institutional support systems adequately provide reinforcement to meet student needs.

Challenges were prevalent in the implementation of academic support services, including Student Development, Student Welfare and Institutional Student Development Program every higher education institution (HEIs) must administer to enhance students' holistic development. Guidance and counseling services and student welfare initiatives remained in high demand particularly in times of vulnerability among uncertainty in the 21st century. Leadership and responsibility among students were essential to become future contributors to society, in addition, health, safety and overall student welfare becomes central to achieving institutional and national educational goals.

Amidst the challenges, best practices shared by SAS practitioners effectively transformed their institutions into environments where diversity and inclusivity were appreciated rather than treated as ideal concepts. Notable initiatives included the establishment of committees and organization designed to address student needs which significantly enhanced the delivery of support and services for learners and stakeholders. Personalized monitoring activities and discipline efforts, alongside strong collaboration with community stakeholders, contributed to active student engagement inside campuses. Further, supporting students in their development of their talents and skills reinforced a positive educational atmosphere. These best practices impacted individual students and strengthened broader student community, the entire education systems and the larger society beyond academic institutions.

Recommendations

1. Professional organizations may suggest possible solutions to address problems in the delivery of student affairs in the province.
2. Professional organizations in partnership with other universities may provide training to student affairs and services practitioners to capacitate their service to the students.
3. Administrators may evaluate the status of their student affairs and services offices and provide recommendations to address the issues and concerns that student affairs practitioners incur.
4. Administrators may support student affairs practitioners in the delivery of services, especially those concerning the welfare of students in the campus.
5. College administrators, local executives and national authorities may craft policies, ordinances or executive orders to support the delivery of academic support in the higher education institutions.
6. Lastly, future researchers may conduct in-depth studies on the issues and concerns experienced by the student affairs and services practitioners, as well as conduct further studies in the efficiency of innovative

practices cited in this study. Such studies may employ methodological approaches by incorporating the perspectives of students and other relevant stakeholders, direct observations, and institutional records to triangulate the findings.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express utmost gratitude to Southern Bicol Colleges for the institutional support provided during this study. Sincerest gratitude also to the student affairs and services practitioners who participated in the research and to the experts who served as advisers and validators.

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