

Functional Areas Project

An exchange of ideas, information, and good practice is pervasive in student affairs. This activity is structured for you to learn about areas of practice in our profession. It is designed for you to examine how one area functions and how its functionality compares to other parts of the institution. In this project, you will pick a functional area in a student affairs division and interview two professionals who work within your chosen functional area, one from Penn State and another at institution of your choice.

At times this project requires you to work with a classmate. Together you will construct interview questions, conduct an interview, and present your findings in class. On your own, you will be conducting an interview and writing a narrative.

The objectives of this assignment are to:

- Examine a functional area within the scope of student services through unobtrusive measures.
- Gain insight and information about student affairs through an interview with a professional.
- Explain the role this functional area has with regard to serving students and how it is organized within the institution.
- Assess a functional area including constructing recommendations for enhancement.
- Compare and contrast the operation of this functional area with a similar unit at another institution.
- Provide a holistic perspective of a functional area.

Selecting your area of interest

At some points, you will conduct parts of this assignment with a classmate. You will first choose a few areas interest and rank them based on your preference. In class, teams will be matched based on similar interests. Sue and Kip reserve the rights to enact random assignment or narrow the topic's scope.

Some areas to choose from may include, but are not limited to:

Admissions
Financial Aid
Academic Advising
Student Activities
Orientation/First Year Programs
Judicial Affairs
Career Services
Residence Life
Study Abroad
Athletics
Disability Services

Fraternity and Sorority Life
Religious Affairs
Service Learning
University Health Services
Advocacy Units
(Multi)Cultural Center
Women's Center
LGBT Student Services
Commuter Student Services
Adult/Non-traditional Student Services
International Student Services

Choosing people to interview

You will each pick someone outside of Penn State whose duties fall within the scope of your chosen functional area to interview. As a pair, you will interview a professional working at Penn State in your area of study. The person(s) you select need not be the director of the area; however, she/he should be an experienced professional who can provide insightful and rich responses to your questions. Typically, these professionals have three or more years of experience in your chosen field.

Constructing the questions

Asking the right question is important in eliciting a rich response. You and your teammate will compile a list of questions and submit them for review **on September 15th**. These questions should go beyond information available in print or online. Keep in mind that you are not only discussing the functional area at that specific institution but also the profession in general. We encourage you to go deeper than typical interview questions. You should be able to describe the services as well as how students perceive them. Since diversity is a hallmark of higher education, please be sure to include multiple perspectives. Also you should discuss the influence of institutional characteristics and how it affects the functional area.

Interviewing and Journaling

You are encouraged to not just interview the professional, but rather have a guided conversation with them. The goal is to get rich, useful information, thus you are encouraged to spend about an hour with your participant. You may wish to discuss personal stories when appropriate, but this should not be the focus of your interview. Personal experiences, however, may lend insight when discussing professional competencies. Although you will have structured interview questions, you should also ask for clarification, details, or additional information during your conversation. You are encouraged to take notes during the interview, but the use of recording devices is discouraged; this is not a research study. You are required to journal for approximately an hour after the interview and doing this task well will be very beneficial when writing the narrative. Please revise the journal entry within two days of the interview and then send to Sue and Kip for review. Journals must be completed by October 10th.

Writing the narrative

The narrative is the critical part of this assignment and should receive the most attention and thought. Your paper will include **five sections: an overview, description of your methodology, analysis, recommendations, and a conclusion**. *The overview* should include relevant background information, services provided to students, and the organizational structure. Organizational structure includes topics such as reporting lines, fiscal categories, mission, strategic planning, and professional associations. In *the methods*, you will discuss the processes you used to gather and analyze information. In *the analysis section*, you should integrate course materials, extant theories, CAS standards, and professional association guidelines to constructively evaluate the functional area. In *the recommendations* section, you should make suggestions to enhance the area. Feel free to challenge convention with this part. Finally, the conclusion should tie the all of the previous sections together. The length of the paper should be 10-12 pages. This is 75% of the project's overall grade. A grading rubric is provided for the narrative. This paper is due in class on **October 27th**.

Presenting your findings

You and your teammate will present your findings to the class. This 30 minute presentation will include an overview of the functional area as a profession, differences in the areas as a result of institutional characteristics, and any other relevant information. The presentation should be 25 minutes of content and five minutes for Q&A. This is 25% of the project's overall grade. You will be evaluated on the content, the organization of materials (flow), preparedness, oral communication skills, and your professionalism. You and your teammate will receive the same letter grade.

Notes:

When assessing the strengths and challenges of the functional area you chose, it is necessary to examine it through multiple lenses (institutional size, location, purpose, etc.).

You may discuss any part of this project with others; however, the writing must be your own.

After you both have concluded your interviews, you should discuss them with your teammate. You will want to compare, contrast, look for similarities, differences, and discuss the influence of institutional characteristics as well as effective practices.

It is a courtesy to send your interview questions two days in advance and a thank you note after the interview.

**Functional Area Project
Narrative Rubric**

Topic ↓	Grade →		
	A	B	Try Again*
Content – Overview	Organizational structures are well defined. Services provided to students include multiple perspectives. Historical context is accurate and relevant.	Organizational structures are presented. Services to students are described. Historical context is disjointed.	Limited organizational structure is presented. Services to students lacks detail. Historical context is irrelevant and/or detracts from ideas.
Content – Analysis	Strong and insightful inspection of functional area. Analysis integrates relevant literature that substantially supports the arguments.	Adequate inspection of functional area. Some relevant literature is used. Literature is somewhat integrated into argument.	Weak and cursory inspection of functional area. Little relevant literature is used and/or some literature is irrelevant.
Flow/Presentation	Paper is logically structured. Transitions between ideas are readily used. Introduction engages reader; conclusion succinctly captures the essence of the paper.	Ideas jump around. Transitions are seldom used. Introduction is banal; conclusion does little to tie paper together.	Lack of structure detracts from main ideas. Transitions are needed and rarely used. Introduction does little to inform reader; conclusion is abrupt.
APA Style/Grammar	References are cited properly. Grammar and spelling mistakes are minimal.	Citations include some mistakes. Grammar and spelling detracts from ideas.	APA style is not properly used. Grammar and spelling mistakes are pervasive.
Presentation of Ideas	Ideas are presented on multiple levels including the profession as well as the institution. This concept is pervasive throughout the entire paper.	Ideas are presented in two isolated levels; they are not tied together.	Ideas are presented mostly on one level.

* If any part of the paper is evaluated as “try again”, the entire paper must be resubmitted for review.