Spring 5-14-2018

Promoting Community through Caring Leadership: An Action Research Project

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this study was to increase collaboration across USD's decentralized graduate admission departments through the approach of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013). The study was guided by the overarching question: How can I use caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) within academic affairs to encourage effective collaboration and understanding and foster a sense of community across departments? It was also guided by the sub-questions: Does gender impact the practices of collaboration and exchange of ideas within decentralized admission offices? If so, how does the current culture and structure of USD's graduate admission offices aid/impede the practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) across departments when considering intersecting identities? Data was collected through surveys, evaluations, and reflections with the intention of promoting understanding, encouraging the exchange of ideas, and developing a sense of community. As a result of this study, the Office of Graduate Admissions will continue to foster a stronger sense of community and increase in-person communication between the decentralized admission offices, leading to a better understanding of departmental needs and responsibilities while strengthening cross-departmental efforts to better serve prospective students.

Ultimately, this project is aimed at helping me improve my professional practice as a higher education administrator.

Executive Summary

Purpose

The overall purpose the action research project was to caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to the practices of the Office of Graduate Admissions at the University of San Diego (USD). The anticipated conclusions were that Graduate Admissions would develop stronger connections to the decentralized graduate admission departments.

Personal Investment

Through the practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013), my personal goal was to infuse my work in Graduate Admissions with my values, the Triple Cs: Communication, collaboration, and community building. In addition, it was aimed to improve my professional practice as a higher education administrator.

Primary Guiding Question

How can I use caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) within academic affairs to encourage effective collaboration and understanding and foster a sense of community across departments?

Timeline

November 2017 – April 2018

Primary Participants

Staff members from the Office of Graduate Admissions and the department of Professional and Continuing Education, with limited participation from staff members from the School of Leadership and Education Sciences

Conclusions

The practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) does strengthen relationships with the decentralized admission offices.

Caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) provides insight to the influence of intersecting identities

Annual assessments are useful measurements of Graduate Admissions' application of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013)

Continuous application of caring leadership is required in order to sustain the Triple C's within the culture of the decentralized admissions offices.

Promoting Community through Caring Leadership: An Action Research Proposal

The scope of this action research project was guided by the values I find most important and hope to find reflected within my work in higher education. The value of collaboration is prominent throughout my life because I enjoy working with others for the purpose of creating, changing, and improving our world while maintaining a just and equitable environment. I also value building community as a necessity for establishing a welcoming and healthy workplace. Lastly, I value open communication as an ongoing practice of leadership. Each of these guided me to a concern of how practices in higher education may hinder those values, especially when working across several departments with a common long-term goal. I have reflected on the roles I have taken on since I completed my undergraduate career and the assumptions I have needed to overcome as I attempted to practice leadership. I have often been underestimated because of my identity as a young Latina and therefore have needed to prove myself as competent. This was especially true in my position as the Admission and Outreach Coordinator at The Preuss School UCSD where, after three years, I struggled to make permanent change in the admissions process because I lacked the formal authority to do so (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.14). Yet, I continued to take risks and earn the respect of others, leaving the position proud of the changes I was able to implement. I also left my successor knowing she would continue to build on the strong bonds of community and collaboration I had established with the staff members to uphold the mission of the school.

I am now currently employed at the Office of Graduate Admission at the University of San Diego (USD). Within my current position, I have experienced similar obstacles presented in a variety of ways. I have been able to navigate these successfully because I continued to practice my values of collaboration and open communication. As a student in the MA in Higher

Education Leadership (HELD) program, I have also been able to practice leadership as a way of

improving relationships within the immediate scope of Graduate Admission. But building this

sense of community has been limited to my office exclusively and has not extended towards the

individual graduate admission offices housed within USD's schools. Since the Office of

Graduate Admission is a decentralized admission office, our positions require that we work with

the admission offices housed in individual USD colleges. It is this limitation that has made me

curious about how others practice leadership and what forms their actions take. It is through my

action research project that I intend to become more knowledgeable about leadership practices,

specifically through caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013), and its impact on higher education

administration. I established the following questions to guide my research:

> How can I use caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) within academic affairs to encourage
>
> effective collaboration and understanding and foster a sense of community across
>
> departments?

- Does gender impact the practices of collaboration and exchange of ideas within

    decentralized admission offices? If so, how does the current culture and structure of

    USD's graduate admission offices aid/ impede the practice of caring leadership

    (Uusiautti, 2013) across departments when considering gender and intersecting

    identities?

These questions in turn help infuse my work in higher education with my values of collaboration,

communication, and community, or my "Triple C's".

Background

My work in higher education has consisted of coordinator and data processor roles within

academic and student affairs. As a master's candidate in HELD, I have had the opportunity to

use the work by Heifetz and Linsky (2002) to reflect on my previous experiences in both areas of

higher education and to compare leadership practices. Most importantly, the HELD program has

helped me understand the distinction between formal and informal forms of authority and

leadership that are recognizable within all institutions. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) describe

authority as the power granted to a person because of their role and leadership as the action of

mobilizing people to address challenges and communicating the possibility of improvements

through social change (pp. 14—25). It is these definitions that motivated me to observe the

Office of Graduate Admission, its relationship to others and to the overall mission of the

university, and how these align to my values. In exploring this relationship, I identified an area

in my work where I can practice leadership to strengthen communication and collaboration

across admission departments. I also used the question of applying leadership across

decentralized admission offices as a springboard to better inform my practice.

The work of Wang and Berger (2010) uses similar description of authority and leadership

as Heifetz and Linsky (2002). Their work recognizes the need for leaders in higher education,

even though leadership theory and practice continue to be viewed as separate and autonomous.

Wang and Berger (2010) assessed that those assigned to "leadership roles," or more accurately

roles of formal authority, are limited in their practice of leadership due to policies and

expectations of higher education institutions (p. 5). The lack of these practices can and have led

to a hindrance in impactful change administrators can create within their institutions. Wang and

Berger (2010) urge institutions to encourage the use of leadership theory and practice in

administrative roles – developing competent leadership increases the success of universities as

spaces for learning (p. 7). The work of Wang and Berger (2010) served to inform the importance

of constant assessment of current practices within the Office of Graduate Admission. It also

assisted me in framing the mission of the decentralized admission offices: to recruit and assist

applicants to the university while remaining conscious of current policies that limit the power of

formal authority when working with other admission offices. In continuing to explore the theme

of leadership practices, I came across the term caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013, pp. 485 – 486),

the practice which guided the actions and reflections of my research.

Uusiautti (2013) presents the importance of applying caring leadership, or the practice of

mindfulness and authenticity, in higher education (pp.483—484). She uses the experiences of

higher education administrators (HEAs) in Finland and the United States as examples of

situations that have been most rewarding because they practiced caring leadership (Uusiautti,

2013, pp. 485 – 486) The examples provided by HEAs spanned across various situations, such as

their work performance, their relations to others, and their experiences giving and receiving

feedback. This practice is relevant to the decentralized admission offices at USD in that it

informs unique ways of managing and leading that can promote pride and positive experiences.

Because of the decentralized structure of graduate admissions, practicing caring leadership aids

in managing difficult situations across offices while making the work even more fulfilling

(Uusiautti, 2013, pp. 486-490). Having worked within USD's Graduate Admissions Office for

two years prior to establishing the action research project, I recognized that caring leadership

(Uusiautti, 2013) would allow me to simultaneously improve my own practices by incorporating

mindfulness and authenticity in my daily practices with the intention of encouraging open

communication and collaboration and create a greater sense of community across decentralized

admission offices. Yet, with this framework in mind, I remained conscious of the limitations of

observing and intervening with leadership practices, specifically the need for others to recognize

the value of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) as a practice to foster communication and

collaboration in order to develop a greater sense of community. It is because of this that I

recognized my observations would need to note the intersecting identities that influence the

current and future connections with Graduate Admission and the decentralized graduate

admission offices. By understanding those intersecting identities and the culture of other offices,

I hoped to successfully effect positive change for the decentralized offices.

Two themes that emerged in my research are the ways to practice authenticity and caring

while also applying a multi-level leadership approach. I agree with the themes and limitations

experienced by women in administration as it is something I experience and observe on a day to

day basis. It is because of this that I would like to further learn how women in higher education

administration may feel limited by the invisible structures. This is relevant to Graduate

Admission's work because it helps frame unconscious practices that could be improved through

caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013), since the primary participants in the department and its

partner offices identify as women. Acker (2012) conducted an analysis of gender dynamics in

academic administrations framed by the concepts of learning leadership, surviving organizations,

and performing leadership (p. 411). She also used narratives to reflect and make sense of her

actions and those of her organization. Her narrative informs the unconscious ways in which

current structures in administration can limit women's roles in pursuing positions of formal

authority and can interfere with practices of collaboration and the exchanging of ideas.

White (2012) also conducted an assessment of the Higher Education Resource Services

(HERS) organization in order to better meet the present needs of women pursuing leadership

roles. White explained the historical success HERS had in preparing women as prominent

leaders in higher education, which was supported through the reflections of the program's

alumni. Yet, differing generational perspectives and changes facing the economy called for

HERS to create change within itself. With the assessment, HERS revised its curriculum, focused on new obstacles facing women, and strengthened its network between current and graduates of the HERS institutes. The assessment serves as encouragement for Graduate Admission to continuously reassess how it meets the needs of the population it is serving. As an office that also houses women in positions of authority, it encourages the practice of leadership in other women even when they are not presented with formal authority. The HERS assessment can also inform Graduate Admission on the obstacles facing women in practicing leadership to encourage support across admission offices.

Context

The organizational setting for my research begins with the overall institution, the University of San Diego (USD), a private Catholic university. The institution serves undergraduate and graduate students and also offers professional development courses. I work within the Office of Graduate Admission (Graduate Admissions), a decentralized admission office responsible supporting recruitment efforts for all graduate programs, collecting and processing materials for all prospective graduate applicants, and for disseminating admission decisions. Graduate Admissions is housed with the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, both of which are beneath the umbrella of Enrollment Management (EM), along with the Office of the Registrar, Financial Aid, and the One Stop Center. Graduate Admissions works closely with the departments under EM, and must also work closely with the admission/recruitment offices organized within the separate colleges: The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), the Hanh School of Nursing and Health Sciences (SON), the School of Business (SB), the Kroc School of Peace Studies (KSPS), the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES), and the

department of Professional and Continuing Education (PCE). EM is a division of academic

affairs and ultimately reports to the Office of the Provost.

   The Office of Graduate Admission is relatively small in comparison to other departments

at USD. It is made up of one administrative assistant, three admission services assistants, one

assistant director and one associate director. My specific role in Graduate Admission is that of

Admission Services Assistant (ASA) where, at the time of planning my action research project, I

processed applications for all SOLES graduate programs and two PCE programs. My duties as

ASA typically focused on data entry, data tracking, and decision processing while also assisting

students during the application process. Since the Office of Graduate Admissions is also

responsible for upholding university policy but are not directly responsible for making admission

decisions, my position requires collaboration between departments and the self-initiative to

resolve issues. It has been a new experience for navigating the expectations of a decentralized

admission office, and as a student within the HELD program, I have used the experience to

attempt the practice of leadership in my day-to-day duties. Yet, I continued to look for additional

ways in which I could practice leadership that would make the work more meaningful while also

building stronger relationships across departments. This is also a sentiment I have heard echoed

by others working in academic affairs, especially by those whose formal authority (Heifetz and

Linsky, 2002, pp. 14-25) feels limited. These mutual experiences interest me because it indicates

an area where Graduate Admission can improve its effectiveness within USD, not only for the

purposes of bettering interpersonal relationship but also as a way of meeting USD's goal for

"institutional effectiveness", one of the pathways encouraged by USD's campaign for

"Envisioning 2024" (2017).The concept of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) for me indicated a

way in which Graduate Admissions could practice mindfulness and authenticity to encourage

collaboration and build community. Caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) has also made me curious to see how its practice can establish a support network across departments. I recognized that I would face challenges in the application of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013). These challenges would range from collecting data outside of my immediate network of Graduate Admission as well building further trust across departments in ensuring confidentiality. It was my hope that the application of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) could inform the challenges faced in higher education administration and implement effective changes to better practices across the graduate admission offices and enrollment management departments.

Needs Assessment

I established that a need was present as Graduate Admission was experiencing several changes while other departments were simultaneously experiencing changes in their internal structures. At the time of planning my action research project, I was also transitioning to my current position as ASA, as having previously worked in Graduate Admission as the administrative assistant. My experience with working with the different admission offices had been limited to general inquiries, as more specific inquiries were directed to their corresponding ASA's. I began my training to fill the previous ASA's position; when I took on my role, the position for the SOLES Director for Admission and Outreach became vacant, meaning that for several months I relied on the entire staff within the SOLES Admissions and Outreach (SOLES) office for information concerning its applicants. It was understandable at the time that the vacant position was a strain to the SOLES office, and I continued my training to understand policies within Graduate Admission for the purposes of the ASA role. When the director's position was filled, I was placed in the unique situation of still learning my position while also acting as a resource for the director. Graduate Admission was also transitioning to a new application system

and in the process of hiring a new ASA, to fill the role left vacant by one of my colleagues. Each

of these changes introduced me to several challenges, mainly on how best to communicate the

needs of Graduate Admission while meeting the needs of the admission offices we were there to

assist. It also helped me see how little I knew about the details of the admission processes of

other offices. My predecessor had only been interested in acquiring enough information to

processes applications, and not to collaborate more closely with others to build a stronger

community. In taking on the role of ASA, my predecessor's approach stood at odds with my own

values of collaboration, communication and community. Having such a limited understanding of

other departments has in turn presented situations that could have benefitted from caring

leadership (Uusiautti, 2013).

Gutterman and Mitchell (2016) found that "multilevel leadership" (p. 55) led to an

increase in overall engagement while building a stronger community through the "practice to

exchange ideas" (p. 43) between faculty and administrators. The practice of "caring leadership"

in higher education was presented through the work Uusiautti (2013), who compared the

experiences of higher education administrators in the Finland and the United States. As a

decentralized admission office, practicing caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) could aid in

managing difficult situations across offices. Both Gutterman and Mitchell (2016) and Uusiautti

(2013) served as catalysts to understanding how leadership can be applied across departments to

strengthen relationships and introduce unique ways to collaborate with others. Most importantly,

I was inspired by caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) as a way of practicing authenticity and

mindfulness because it aligns with my values of understanding and open communication to

maintain healthy group dynamics.

Planning

I have shared my concerns with my associate director, who showed her enthusiasm in developing stronger relationships with other departments. The structure of a decentralized admission office requires constant collaboration but we rarely evaluate the effectiveness of that collaboration. My associate director gave me permission to conduct interventions with the goal of improving how our office functions when assisting other departments. At this point, I determined I would also need to reach out to the departments and describe the intention of my interventions and to ensure participation. For the purposes of my cycles, I would focus my interventions on the programs whose applications I process. My goal was to engage more closely with SOLES director, program coordinators, and other points of contact for the programs and practice authenticity and understanding while remaining open to learning more about their work. I would extend invitations by e-mail and in-person, which in itself acts as an intervention, as many of those I "work" with are people whom I know only by name and have never met in person. I would ensure confidentiality by excluding their names and the departments, referring only to the school in a broader sense.

In order to better understand how to introduce caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to the decentralized admission offices, I was aware that I would first need to understand the context in which the offices were created. Again, this would require that I connect with people at USD who have been on campus for several years, since even the history of our own department is limited and not documented internally. Additional research on group and gender dynamics would assist me in understanding intersecting identities that influence how the decentralized admission offices function with one another. My ultimate goal was to build on the relationships I had

already established and connect with others who are willing to share their narratives to the work

we do.

Critical Friends

My critical friends, or validation group, are the members assigned during the Leadership

547 Action Research course. The members are Maggie Anderson, David Horber, Novien Yarber,

and Dan Morgan. Each member is currently completing the MA in Higher Education Leadership

(HELD) program and are also engaged in their own action research. David and Novien both hold

graduate assistantships on campus, Dan is helping implement USD's strategic plan (Envisioning

2024), and Maggie is an administrative assistant at UCSD's School of Engineering. In addition

to the critical friends from LEAD 547, I also have reached out to a current admission counselor

and a graduate assistant from Undergraduate Admission who are also pursuing their degrees in

HELD. At the time of planning, I referred to both set of critical friends to understand better ways

of pursuing my action research plan. They have also been a source of validation in showing how

the intervention I could stage would be meaningful.

Anticipated Outcomes

I genuinely value the opportunities to have open communication, collaborate with others

and build a sense of community. In having the opportunity to foster these through caring

leadership (Uusiautti, 2013), I hoped to improve the practices of the decentralized admission

offices while developing relationships of understanding. At the end of this action research

project, I hoped to learn concrete interventions to continue to meet the mission of the

decentralized admission offices. I also want to use the project as an opportunity to continue

evaluating the relationships of the admissions offices beyond the timeline of the action research

project. In order to continue developing healthy working relationships, our office will need to

exchange ideas and engage in more open-communication with the intention of understanding one

another's uncommon duties with a common goal.

In addition, it is anticipated that the practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) is

sustainable and can be used with all the decentralized graduate admission offices at USD. I also

hope to better understand intersecting identities as a potential influence towards building

community and practicing caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013). In making observations about

underlying factors that can influence the dynamics of our groups, not only will I address issues to

make sustainable change, but I will also learn how to continue this work in other environments

within higher education.

Methodology

Action Research Cycle

McNiff and Whitehead (2011) describe action research as a "form of inquiry that enables

practitioners in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work" (p. 7). By

conducting action research, one has the capacity to influence change while simultaneously

informing one's practices and encourage learning. I have selected the "Spiral of Action Research

Cycles" (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 20), figure 1, for the purposes of understanding the factors

influencing the group dynamics across graduate admission departments, and if caring leadership

(Uusiautti, 2013) is an effective intervention to foster open communication, collaboration, and

sense of community. Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) spiral begins with the initial steps of strategic

planning, taking action, making observations and evaluations, and critical self-reflection (p. 19).

Within each cycle, Zuber-Skerritt (2001) describes specific projects that can be conducted within

each cycle. One uses the completion of the initial cycle to inform and revise the original plan and

implement a new intervention (action). This then leads to further observations and reflection and provides a platform for additional cycles with the same steps.

Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) spiral provides a comprehensive way to address areas of change, implement change, assess the success of that change, and assess areas for further improvement. I modified the internal projects of each cycle to best meet the needs of the graduate admission organizations. In the case of my research, it allowed me to methodically implement interventions while also testing my assumptions via reflection to assure my growth as a leader. As action research requires more than one cycle, often occurring simultaneously, and multiple levels of reflection (Coughlan and Brannick, 2005, pp. 23-26), Zuber-Skerritt's (2001) spiral allowed me to approach problems systematically. It also required that I be conscious of my high level of comfort in implementing change systematically, which may not be mirrored by others involved in the research.

Figure 1. The Spiral of Action Research Cycles (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, p. 20)
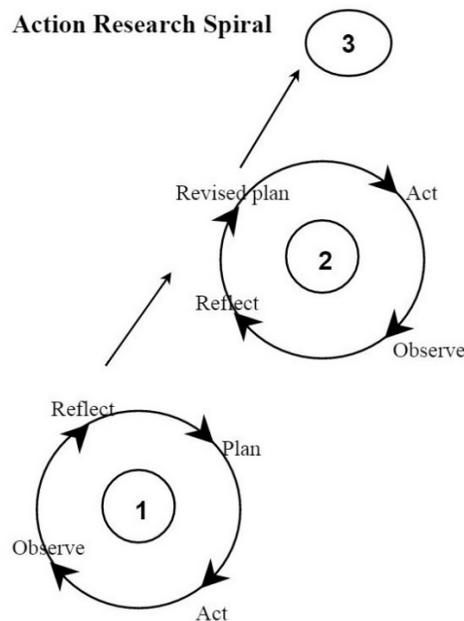
Note: Image retrieved from https://sisaljournal.org/archives/june14/thompson/

By applying this action research methodology, I was able to analyze my own practices in promoting my values of communication, collaboration and community. It allowed me to understand the data I collect from others in order to encourage mutual understanding. It is because of this that implementing the interventions is important to my action research. The decentralized admission offices require continuous collaboration throughout the school year in order to meet the mission of USD. By implementing caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to our work, the decentralized admission offices will better understand the uniqueness of each department and their similarities, and be more cohesive in their efforts to recruit and admit graduate candidates successfully. The strength in choosing Zuber-Skerritt's Action Research Sprial (2001, p. 20) is that it allowed me to strategically present interventions into the structure of Graduate Admission and its sister offices, collect data for analysis, and conduct an analysis of the data and of my own reflections simultaneously. As a spiral, it also informed my next steps. A challenge of this methodology though is that it did require the researcher to conduct analysis through structured and rigid timelines (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, pg. 21), and may require modifications to simplify each internal spiral. I did so by focusing on one intervention per cycle while analyzing the various steps taken to implement it.

Data Collection

My initial form of data was generated through my journaling, mainly to highlight the areas in which the practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) could have aided in the work. According to Perl and Noldon (2000):

Unlike quantitative studies, which have a results section reporting outcomes, many

qualitative theoretical traditions consider the written analysis of a given topic produced

by the researcher to be an actual component of the research itself. The process of

analyzing and writing about a topic is an inherent part of the methodology. (p. 42)

Because of the usefulness in collecting and analyzing data through my own writing, journaling

continued to be a consistent action throughout my action research project. I also staged

interventions by scheduling time to meet with those who oversee the programs for whom I

process applications. My hope was that the members would be open to participating in regularly

scheduled meetings, with the goal of understanding one another's work (practicing mindfulness)

and engage in more meaningful dialogue to build stronger relationships. I also created a

confidential in-take survey (Appendix D) to better gauge if others perceive a need to build a

stronger community across the decentralized admission offices. The one-on-one meetings and

the in-take survey fit into the initial stages, planning and taking action, of the Zuber-Skerritt's

(2001) Action Research Spiral (p. 20). Based off of the feedback of these initial interventions, I

will introduce new interventions to generate data.

My original plan for my action research project was intended to foster closer

relationships with my department and SOLES in order to understand one another's work and

ways to better assist each other, initiated by the request to complete the in-take survey (Appendix

D). The in-take survey and the workshop evaluation will be an opportunity to collect Likert-scale

quantitative data and qualitative open-ended questions. I am specifically incorporating both

quantitative and qualitative methods into my forms in order to easily collect measurable and

uniform data (quantitative), while also allowing for, "Unique and varied stories [that] can best be

heard through qualitative methods" (Perl & Noldon, 2000, p. 43). As part of my second cycle, I

intended to conduct an admission processes workshop open to SOLES Admissions. It was

planned opportunity to better understand admission processes, such as how applications and

decisions are processed, while also allotting time for the exchange of ideas. My goal was to use the workshop as a way to educate myself on the different practices used by each department, both in advising applicants and during the application review process. The final component of the workshop also allotted time for participants to give feedback through a workshop evaluation. I also planned on a third cycle, which would mirror the first, by administering an out-take survey as comparative data to the initial intake. The results of these various forms of data would be subject to the review of my critical friends group to decrease biases.

As you will see in the final implementation of my action research project, several adjustments needed to be made to accommodate changes Graduate Admissions' processes.

Implementation

Pre-Cycle – Adjustments to the plan

Context: My original plan for each cycle depended on the connection I had already established with the SOLES Admissions and Outreach Office during my year as their assigned Admission Services Assistant. I had already prepped the people I would work with full-time to be participants in my research as a way to strengthen our collaboration. Yet, due to staffing changes that occurred within my office throughout the spring 2017, I was reassigned as the main contact for the Professional and Continuing Education (PCE) department on July 10, 2017. I specifically was assigned to work with PCE, which had previously been divided between the three ASAs. PCE was considered the most demanding department to work with and my supervisor believed my professionalism, efficiency, and patience would alleviate the tension between our departments (Meeting notes, July 5).

Adjustments: The restructuring of ASA duties meant I would work exclusively with a department whose primary focus are the online graduate programs and the majority of the staff I

would interact with were not housed on campus, and instead recruit remotely. This change

required me to reevaluate the amount of work I could take on as a full-time employee and as a

student. Should I focus my research with a department I would no longer work with directly,

SOLES, or should I adjust my research to developing the Triple C's with my newly assigned

department, PCE? I worked closely with my adviser, Dr. Christopher Newman, to determine the

best way to proceed, especially because my research was halted until I could get IRB approval.

Ultimately, I made the decision to focus primarily on PCE and build a sense of community to

address the lack of communication and collaboration between the Office of Graduate Admissions

and PCE. If time allowed, I would then include SOLES within my project. Once that decision

was made, I reorganized my timeline (Table 1) to adjust for the delay with my IRB research

approval, granted on October 17, 2017. My original plan to distribute surveys for my first cycle

was pushed from July 2017 to November 2017.

Table 1. Cycle Adjustments and Revised Timeline

CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
November '17	December'17 –January '18	January'18 – April '18
Build connections	Intake surveys	Workshop & Evaluations
Initial one-on-one meetings	Continued one-on-one meetings	Continued one-on-one meetings
Adjustments for cycle 2	Adjustments for cycle 3	Final reflections

Cycle One – Establishing Connection

As the exclusive ASA for PCE, I decided to first establish a personal connection with the

staff involved in the PCE enrollment process. I had previously worked with PCE as their main

point of contact for two programs and had a general understanding that PCE operated differently

from the other departments at USD. Because the majority of their programs are offered online, enrollment advisers working remotely are tasked with the outreach, recruitment, admission and enrollment of all prospective students. They also admit students all year round and operate off a quick turnover rate in order to accommodate the large number of recruited students. PCE was perceived as the most demanding department to work with because of this.

Plan and Action: In order to begin establishing a connection with PCE, I began connecting with the programs coordinators, who do work on campus and coordinate enrollment for admitted students. Being physically located on the USD campus, I was able to meet with the program coordinators regularly to learn more about their enrollment processes, and more importantly, learn the reasoning as to why they operate the way they do. This helped me recognize that both the program coordinators and enrollment advisers had a limited understanding of the function of the Graduate Admissions Office and its role in supporting PCE. Therefore, I began taking worksheets I had originally created for future workshops, the GA App Process Chart (Appendix A) and the GA Squad Contact Sheet (Appendix B), as a way to share the Graduate Admissions process and encourage communication with the PCE staff.

Observation: When I became the ASA for PCE, I immediately observed a lack of trust in from the enrollment advisers in the way our office handled prospective student documentation. I would spend a large part of my day responding to emails clarifying processes and USD admission policies, as well as double-checking applicant documentation. Below is a sample of texts I collected from the enrollment advisers that highlight the themes of distrust, frustration, and misunderstanding that were being experienced:

- "You had said that [university] was previously approved [for a waiver], so we do not need to go through this process every time. Did I misunderstand this?"

- "Who needs to issue the [decision memo]? The student is getting very anxious."

- "Hello - Sorry to bother you but this student is very anxious to get in before the deadline. Do we need anything additional?"

- "I feel it should not be that difficult. These are smart people and they are all having issues. It creates a lot of stress and frustration for all of us and does impact the overall experience. I appreciate your help!"

- "Whether it is user error or in fact a tech issue…my concern is it's effecting too many students and the process is clearly not easy for students."

By creating the GA App Process Chart (Appendix A) and the GA Squad Contact Sheet (Appendix B), I was able to alleviate several concerns about the way our office operates. The GA App Process Chart became a useful reference during the peak of application submissions to empower enrollment advisers. The contact sheet helped specify the resources that are available to PCE via the best point of contact and by including profile pictures of the staff in Graduate Admissions, it provided a sense of connection between our departments, in particular with the enrollment advisers whom would not have the opportunity to meet our staff in person. The contact sheet also encouraged communication over the phone in addition to email and allowed the enrollment advisers and other PCE staff members to genuinely feel supported by myself and the Graduate Admissions' staff. I observed a shift in the tone of the emails as well:

- "I appreciate you looping everyone in and investigating each individual case."

- "I appreciate how hard the team works to resolve these issues as quickly as possible!"

- "Amazing! Thank you. I know it is such a crazy week. Appreciate all you do!"

- "Thank you so much! We really appreciate you and your hard work. Thanks Again."

The consistency of the support I was providing helped alleviate the frustration and distrust that had previously existed and transformed are working relationships into one of mutual respect and appreciation.

Reflection: The process of distancing myself from what my routine as an ASA prior to working with PCE exclusively required that I practice caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013, pp. 483-484) in order to be a more empathetic liaison to PCE. Because my office viewed PCE as the most demanding department amongst all the graduate programs, my observations also shed light to my own negative perceptions of the work to come. These observations helped me suspend my own judgments – I had assumed PCE's staff questioned my work ethic and they intentionally disregarded Graduate Admission policies to accommodate their own turnover rates. Once I applied a mindful and authentic mentality to my actions, the results of our improved working relationships became evident. It also forced me to reflect on my own biased expectations of how specific staff members should operate. My journals provided insight to how I considered the male enrollment advisers to be "demanding" while I noted the female enrollment advisers as "panicky" and "easily worried".

This realization helped me recognize that, "how one learns to lead or manage…and what styles of management" (Acker, 2012, p. 412) depend heavily on "gendered leadership styles" (Acker, 2012, p. 412) and I cannot improve my own practice as a higher education administrator without acknowledging and addressing my gendered biases. By creating the two worksheets that provided more context to the PCE staff. I noted a shift in my own approach to each question I received from PCE, and caught myself thinking on several occasions, "Wow, [enrollment adviser] is actually really nice" and was just trying to do their job with the information they had available. Thus, encouraging more personal interactions via phone rather than email provided me with the

context I needed to humanize the PCE staff members who worked remotely off campus and improve my practice in order to introduce my second cycle.

Cycle Two – Collaboration and Communication

Revised Plan and Action: On February 5, 2018, I emailed my formal invitation (Appendix C) to participate in my action research project to the fifteen PCE staff members with whom I worked directly. The invitation asked each member to completing the confidential online in-take survey, the Admissions Processes In-Take Survey (Appendix C). The survey questions were framed as an assessment of to measure the positive and negative perspectives of PCE towards Graduate Admissions through Likert-scaled questions and a section for comments. Ten of the fifteen staff members submitted survey responses. Because each response provided valuable feedback to the perceptions of the work done by Graduate Admissions, my supervisor also asked me to share the request with the six SOLES administrative staff who also work with prospective students. Of the six, three SOLES staff members submitted survey responses.

Observations: Figure 2 shows the results of the survey questions. Overall, the responses provided by the thirteen participants were positive. For the four questions total, 56% of the participants responded as "strongly agree" and 33% responded as "agree". This indicated an that the Graduate Admissions Office not only has an understanding of PCE's and SOLES' missions but that it was also providing exceptional support to each office. About 10% of participants indicated they "neither agreed or disagreed" with each statement. This result indicated an area for continued improvement in my practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) – the neutrality of the responses suggests that the ASAs were only providing adequate support to the survey participants in the PCE and SOLES departments. None of the participants selected they disagreed with the statements, while 2% of the total participants indicated they "strongly disagreed" with the

level of communication between themselves and their assigned ASA. This again indicated an area

for improvement. From this response, one can infer that the participant who "strongly disagreed"

did want more direct communication between themselves and their assigned ASA. The Graduate

Admissions staff though, including myself, had assumed that this participant did not want to be

involved with the day-to-day actions and therefore had never extended an invitation regarding

updates and support available regarding prospective applicants.

In addition to the scaled survey responses, participants also submitted comments addressing

the questions:

- In what ways could the Office of Graduate Admission provide support to your department

  to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students and current

  applicants?

- In what ways could the Admissions Services Assistant (Hazel or Mike) provide support to

  your department to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students

  and current applicants?

The full transcript of their responses are available in Appendix E. The responses to each

question were scored as either positive (+1), neutral (0), or negative (-1). Responses that I

considered positive were any that praised the Graduate Admissions processes and responses

that indicated areas for improvement were considered negative. Any participant who left this

section of the survey blank or did not request any changes to the processes were considered

neutral and were not included in the comparison in figure 3. Ten of the twenty-six submitted

statements were considered neutral. Five responses were considered positive because of the

high praise in the statements and eleven responses were considered negative. The eleven

responses provided vital insight to the scaled survey results as they indicated the need for

increased communication and collaboration (Table 2) between the decentralized admission

offices despite the positive results of figure 2.

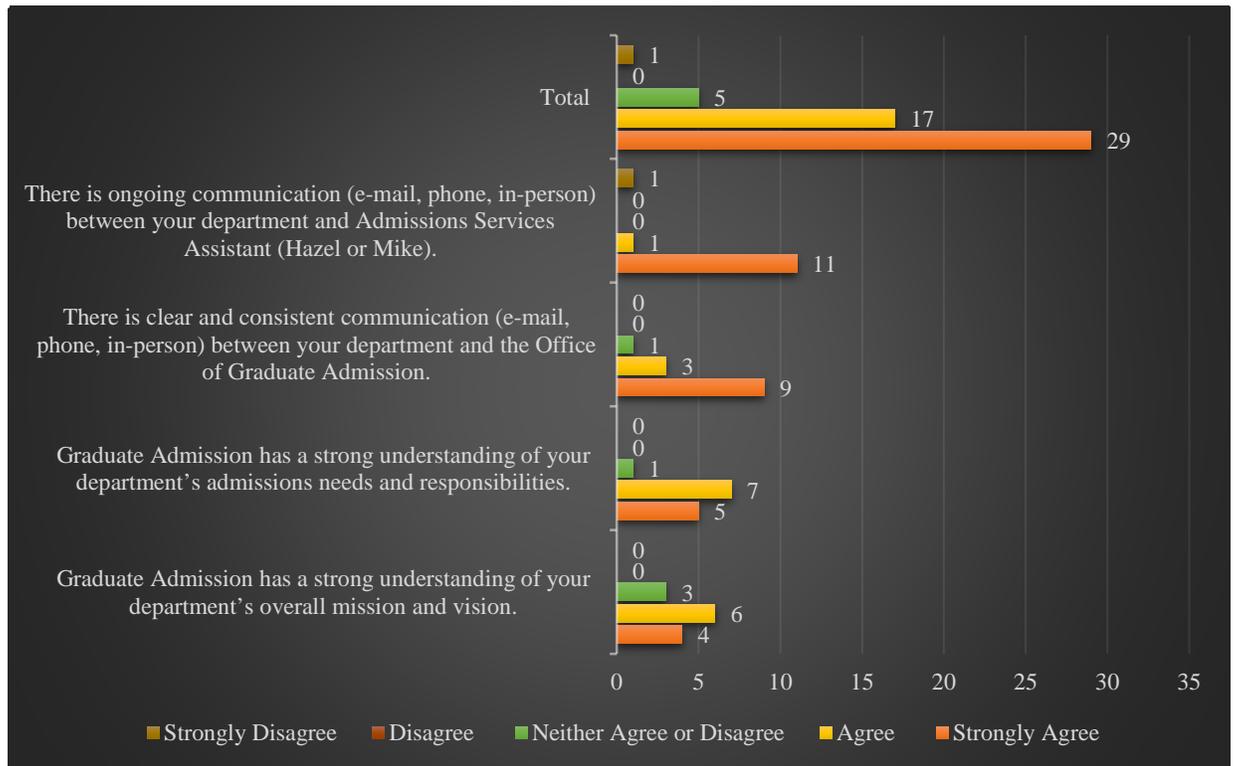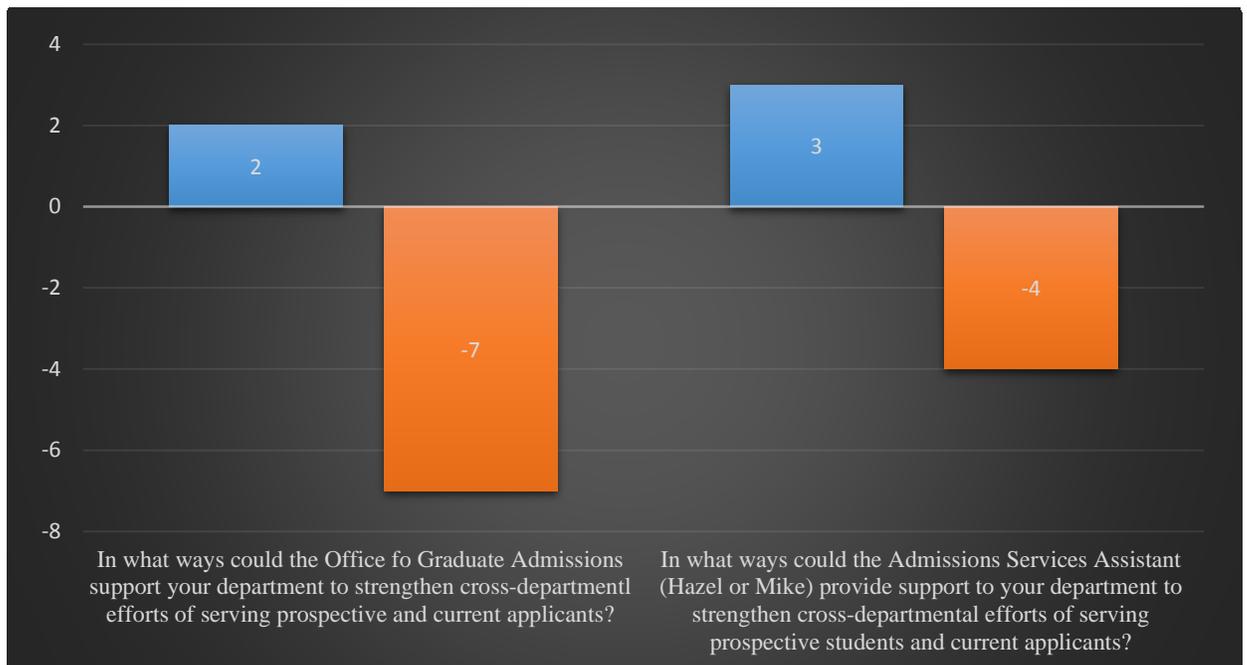*Figure 2.* Admissions Processes In-Take Scaled Survey Results

Figure 3. Admissions Processes In-Take Survey Free Response Scored Results

Reflection: I found the results of my second cycle very promising in that it reaffirmed my need to apply caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to our decentralized admission offices. The scaled results of the in-take survey showed how the Graduate Admission processes were adequately addressing the day-to-day tasks required to meet the needs of the departments, or what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) would call the technical challenges (p.14). But the free response results indicated a want for further support from the designated ASA and the Graduate Admissions office in general. It encouraged the importance of infusing my work in higher education with my Triple C's as a way of shifting the culture of the decentralized offices to not only address the technical challenges but also the adaptive challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p.14) we experienced in our missions to serve prospective graduate students. During my practice throughout my second cycle, I also reflected on the two responses regarding marketing efforts and the creation of a "frequently asked questions" form (Table 2). Graduate Admissions does not provide marketing support for any office and it does have a "frequently asked questions" website to address the general questions of all prospective applicants, regardless of the graduate program they are interested in. Yet, these responses indicated a want for more individualized attention towards the department they indicated a misunderstanding of the role of Graduate Admissions in supporting the decentralized admissions office. I shared both of these responses with my direct supervisor as well as with the Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management to encourage caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) from higher authorities.

Table 2. Excerpts of Negative Responses submitted in In-Take Survey as divided by theme

Need for Increased Communication	Need for Increased Collaboration
At times things take a few days longer than we would hope for…students are anxious to see their checklists… we would be able to communicate those updates to students much sooner.	Meet regularly/do a swap roles explanation of departments/ "Day in the Life of " each member that works together… going to other departments together to see how roles/functions work.

Assist with market research, outreach efforts - both online and in person.	Develop a shared FAQ for prospective students completing applications that is constructed with faculty (application reviewer) input.
I think together, along with other graduate programs, we should meet more regularly to discuss application challenges and process improvements.	I would love to better under the day-to-day functions…We are always looking for ways to streamline and understanding the ins and outs of what you do would help us too.

Cycle Three – Community

Revised Plan and Action: My third cycle was directly influenced by theme of

collaboration in cycle 2 (Table 2). Four of the seven negative responses for the first free response

question (Figure 3) requested the opportunity to understand how the Office of Graduate

Admissions functions. One responses dubbed it a, "Day in the Life of" (Table 2) Graduate

Admissions. In my original action research plan, I had intended to host a processes workshop for

SOLES as a way to address questions while also building community by meeting with the

SOLES stakeholders in their space. I modified this plan for PCE by scheduling one-on-one

meetings with the on-campus program coordinators and an online training with the enrollment

managers. The most notable modification to this plan was that I was also able to incorporate my

colleagues in Graduate Admissions as part of the workshop so that each attendee could learn

about the day-to-day functions of our office. This individualized workshop adopted the name

Enrollment Management Exchange (EMX), as it followed a similar structure to a workshop

coordinated amongst the enrollment management offices, and was assessed through my

workshop evaluation form (Appendix G). The modified EMX consisted of ten PCE remote

participants, three PCE on-campus participants, and one SOLES on-campus participant. The four

on-campus participants received an emailed invitation on March 8, 2018 (Appendix E) to

schedule an hour and a half long meeting while the remote participants received the same

invitation modified with a link to the web-conferencing site, join.me.

Observation: PCE's reaction to the modified EMX was a very positive one. They were enthusiastic to see that the survey results were led to a concrete result and that the staff members who worked most closely with me would have the opportunity to learn more about our office processes. The first in-person EMX was scheduled for March 21- the PCE program coordinator who attended shadowed the Graduate Admission administrative assistant, associate director, and myself. This schedule was replicated on April 10 with two PCE program coordinators. We also extended the EMX opportunity to the newest staff member of the SOLES Admissions and Outreach Office on March 26 and was facilitated by the ASA assigned to SOLES. The general consensus of each in-person meeting was that the EMX was useful and it helped clarify several of the steps that occur in our office when we process documentation for prospective students. It also created a sense of understanding of the dynamic that exists between the program coordinators, the enrollment advisers, and myself as their ASA. The program coordinators were able to provide context to the various pressures experienced by the enrollment advisers since they operate remotely. This information was incredibly useful and I was able to incorporate the feedback into the online EMX workshop, which I facilitated on April 3. Hosted through the web conferencing site, join.me, I walked the enrollment advisers through the various databases I use on a day-to-day basis: Banner, Xtender, SalesForce, WebAdmit, and UniCas. I also walked them through common scenarios we dealt with and how each scenario triggered a different process, which often involved manually correcting the applicant's data in each of those databases. The majority of the enrollment advisers were surprised with the amount of changes one scenario could trigger and the online EMX ended with a new sense of appreciation for the highly detailed work each ASA invested in the prospective students.

In order to better assess the level of success with the EMX workshops, I also administered a workshop evaluation (Appendix G) to each of the participants. Of the fourteen participants, I received EMX evaluations from six (Figure 4). Despite the reduced number of participant responses, the results of the evaluations were generally positive and served as validation for the time and energy committed to each EMX.

Figure 4. EMX Evaluation Scaled Responses
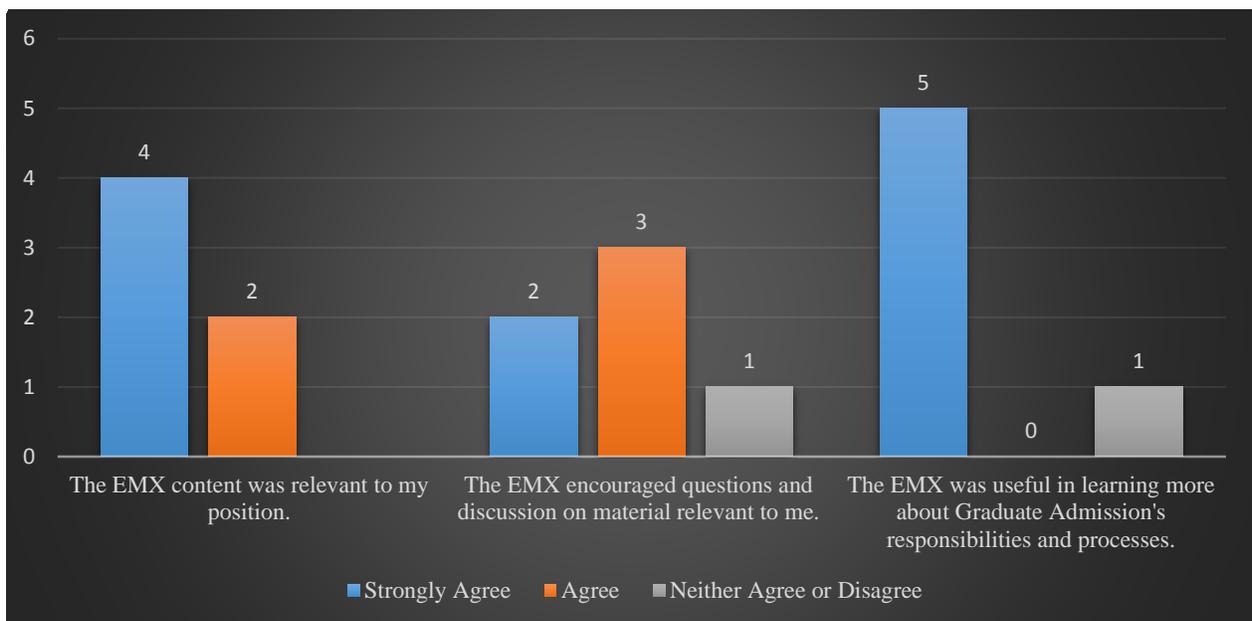
Each response provided showed the participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the content of the EMX and its applicability to PCE and Graduate Admissions. The participant who selected "neither agree or disagree" to two of the questions was submitted by the longest serving enrollment adviser, who shared privately that the increased communication with me had provided clarification in those specific areas prior to the online EMX. In addition to the scaled responses, the participants also submitted free responses to three questions. Each of the responses are transcribed in Appendix H. The participants responses were all positive and provided useful feedback for future EMX workshops. One response in particular validated my

intention to infuse the EMX workshop with my Triple C's: "The candid openness of work being done". I was able to use caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) as a practice of authenticity and mindfulness to connect with the PCE staff in a way that was received as genuine care.

Reflection: The focus of my action research project was to apply caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to mu practice as a higher education administrator. The results of Figure 4 and Appendix H helped validate the approach I used working with PCE, and it personally made me more effective in my role as ASA. I continued to journal throughout the action research project and noted changes in amount of information PCE shared with me.This, coupled with the increased number of phone conversations, allowed me to develop a greater sense of community while addressing unspoken biases that existed between Graduate Admissions and PCE originally. I consider these biases to be the influences that shape, "…everyday lives includ[ing] age, race, class, geographic location, and the politics of gender" (Wallace and Wallin, 2015, p. 416). By applying caring leadershi to my day-to-day duties, I began the process to address the influences of my own intersecting identities and those of the PCE staff. The third cycle showed how geographical location has played a strong role in the perception of PCE as the most demanding graduate department because the enrollment advisers are limited to the knowledge they had remotely. By investing more time into sharing our processes with PCE in an authentic and caring way, I was able to decrease the challenges PCE and Graduate Admissions faced during peak admission dates.

Conclusion

As a result of the information collected from PCE, and to an extent from SOLES, the Office of Graduate Admissions has continued the dialogue of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) with the Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management. Graduate Admissions is currently

evaluating its role as a support for the decentralized admissions office and as an enforcer of USD admission policies. There has also been a recognition within Graduate Admissions of the improved relationship with PCE, especially the enrollment advisers, is a direct result of level of care I provided to infuse my work with collaboration, strong communication, and a sense of community. As a result, we have begun implementing components of each of my cycles with the other decentralized admission offices, starting by sharing the GA App Process Chart (Appendix A) and the GA Squad Contact Sheet (Appendix B) and encouraging conversation by phone and in-person. I have also submitted the following recommendations to standardize assessments of our practices:

1. Encourage the practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) in each of the ASAs to strengthen relationships with the decentralized admission offices

    a. Also use caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) to be mindful of intersecting identities

2. Use the Admission Processes In-Take survey as an annual assessment to measure Graduate Admissions' application of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013) for all decentralized admission offices

3. Conduct annual EMX workshops to address questions, discuss changes in policy, and connect with staff members outside of Graduate Admissions

    a. Schedule EMX workshops for any new staff members in the decentralized admission offices within a month of their start date

Ultimately, I recognize that the Office of Graduate Admissions can continue to improve on its practice of caring leadership (Uusiautti, 2013). I also recognize that my own time was limited and that the strength of my action research could be improved by analyzing the dynamics of intersecting identities and their influence over the Triple C's.

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Appendix A: Graduate Admissions Application Processes Chart

APPLICATION PROCESS CHART

- AA- Administrative Assistant (Julia)
- ASA – Admission Services Assistant (Hazel, Miguel, Michael)
- SA – Student Assistants

- E-Cab – Folder in GA share drive, houses scanned docs
- EPEX – TOEFL & IELTS
- Indexing- Doc added to student record in Xtender

Before app is submitted

UniCAS
- AA and ASAs will assist applicants as needed via phone or email
- AA and ASAs have dummy app accounts to help walk applicants through process; limited access to view applicant in WebAdmit

Mailed Docs
- AA and SA process hard copies submitted to GA Office (Usually transcripts, EPEX, GRE, MAT)
- AA/SA date stamp all hard copies, stamp "official" as needed
- Look up student in Banner:
- If no record found, AA/SA will scan and save in E-Cab - hard copy is placed in file cabinet
- If record found, AA/SA will create a batch in Xtender and assign the scanned document to the designated ASA - hard copy given to ASA

E-Docs
- AA will check online databases for official transcripts; will check Grads email for supplemental material
- Look up student in Banner:
- If no record found, AA/SA will save doc as PDF and save to E-Cab
- If record found, AA will create a batch in Xtender and assign doc to the designated ASA

After app is submitted

Download
- ASAs load WebAdmit exports to Banner
- Creates Banner record and USD ID number (00 _____)
- Application PDF (LORs, resume, personal statements, etc.) are manually indexed to Banner

E-Cab
- ASA searches for additional application material saved in E-Cab
- If applicant is a former or current USD student, ASA will add their information to Registar request list

Rev 051917

After app is submitted

Xtender Batches
- ASA indexes items from batches to applicant's Xtender record
- Transcript info, GRE/GMAT/MAT and EPEX test score data are manually entered to Banner

USD Transcripts
- AA will request USD transcripts from Registrar every Wednesday **morning** based off of ASA Registar request list
- AA will load and assign USD transcript to designated ASA in Xtender
- May take Registrar **1-7 business days** to send USD transcript

Portal Access
- Login for the MySanDiego Portal is generated in Banner by Hazel/ASA
- Mail merged and emailed to applicants
- Usually sent within 24 hours after appplication is entered in Banner

To Complete Application
- ASA continuously checks E-Cab and Xtender batches for new material using the COGNOS incomplete list

Admission Decisions
- Program department emails decision memos to designated ASA
- ASA will update Banner decision, create admission letter, and index the memo/letter to Xtender
- Domestic applicants receive a hard copy of decision via mail; Intl applicants receive a PDF copy via email

NOTE: Documents are indexed to Xtender within **1-3 business days upon receipt**.

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After app decision is made

Deposit

- Admitted applicants will make a non-refundable deposit through the MySanDiego Portal - AA & ASAs can troubleshoot if needed
- AA reviews daily deposit reports, manually confirms applicants as neeeded, and assigns advisers in Banner
- Admitted applicants can claim USDOne account 24 hours after making deposit - AA & ASAs can assist as needed

Cancellations

- Dept. will notify designated ASA of cancellations via email - decisions updated in Banner:
- Cancelled Implied - Program's decision to cancel student app before making admission decision
- Cancelled Before Offer* - Student has taken action to cancel app
- Cancelled after Offer* - Student declined admission offer
- Cancelled after Confirmed* - Student withdrew from program after making deposit

Deferrals

- Student initiates deferral request with program dept. AFTER making deposit
- If approved, dept. will email deferral form to designated ASA - Indexed to Xtender
- ASA defers original start term, manually creates new record in Banner and codes as "Accepted & Confirmed"

Earlier Start Term

- Student initiates request with program dept. to start in earlier term (ex: applied to fall '17, wants to start summer '17)
- If approved, dept. will email designated ASA - Indexed to Xtender
- ASA deletes original start term, manually replaces record in Banner and matches checklist docs. to original app

*Dept. must send individual cancellation (cannot send names as one list); individual cancellation will be indexed to Xtender.

Rev 051917

Appendix B: GA Squad Contact Sheet

Interdepartmental
Questions
for the
GA Squad?

Here's who to
contact
☺

Monica Mahon
Associate Director
International Applicants
New Program Launches
CRM, EMX and GEARSS
Ext: 5936

Erika Garwood
Assistant Director
UniCAS/Liaison
Salesforce
Operations/Troubleshooting
App Maintenance
Ext: 5981

Julia Lepore (AA)
Gatekeeper to:
Grads E-mail
Main Phone Line
Deposits
Transcripts &
Supplemental App Material
Assists with I-20s
Ext: 4524

Miguel Carrillo (ASA)
SON
SB
Ext: 6724

Michael Castronuovo (ASA)
SOLES
KSPJ
Ext: 6159

Hazel Claros (ASA)
CAS
PCE
Generates MySanDiego
Portal log-ins
Ext: 7953

05/10/2017

Appendix C: Initial Invitation

Promoting Community through Caring Leadership: An Action Research Project

Hello XXXX,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Hazel Claros, a master's candidate USD's Higher Education Leadership program and Admission Services Assistant at the Office of Graduate Admission.

I am conducting research on the practice of "caring leadership" in higher education, with the intention of reviewing current admission processes for the enrollment process while encouraging stronger collaboration and fostering a deeper sense of community across USD's decentralized admissions offices. It will also analyze if gender plays a role in the exchange of ideas within these spaces and if so, use caring leadership to encourage this exchange.

Ultimately, this project is aimed at helping me improve my professional practice as a higher education administrator.

You are invited to participate in my study, which will be conducted throughout the months of February 2017 to April 2018 and will consist of:

- Online in-take survey (5-10 mins)
- One-on-one interview (30 mins)
  - Will be scheduled at your convenience
- Admission Processes workshop (1 hour)
- Online exit survey (5-10mins)

If you are interested in participating, you may begin by completing the confidential online in-take survey:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfXEJ5MCczeKIHUMHZSHQwKcjWgQCQh3VV6HSBkGJtGw6gXZg/viewform?usp=sf_link

If you have any questions about the study, feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and I look forward to working with you more closely.

Warm regards,
Hazel

Hazel J Claros | Admission Services Assistant
Office of Graduate Admissions | Manchester Hall 205
University of San Diego| 5998 Alcalá Park | San Diego, CA 92110-2492
Tel: 619-260-4524 | Fax: 619-260-4158

Appendix D: Online In-Take Survey Script

Graduate Admissions Processes In-Take Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gain a better understanding of general areas in which the Office of Graduate Admission has provided support to your department.

Your answers will remain confidential and will be used to identify ways to increase collaboration across departments.

First and Last Name:

Email:

Please select one answer per question:

1. Graduate Admission has a strong understanding of your department's overall mission and vision.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

2. Graduate Admission has a strong understanding of your department's admissions needs and responsibilities.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

3. There is clear and consistent communication (e-mail, phone, in-person) between your department and the Office of Graduate Admission.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

4. There is ongoing communication (e-mail, phone, in-person) between your department and Admissions Services Assistant (Hazel or Mike). Strongly Agree
   a. Agree
   b. Neither Agree or Disagree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly Disagree

5. In what ways could the Office of Graduate Admission/Hazel provide support to your department in order to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students and current applicants?

6. In what ways could the Admissions Services Assistant (Hazel or Mike) provide support to your department to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students and current applicants?

7. May I contact you to schedule a one-on-one short interview by phone or in-person?

Appendix E: Transcript of In-Take Survey Free Response Results

In what ways could the Office of Graduate Admission provide support to your department to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students and current applicants?
N/A
Meet regularly/do a swap roles explanation of departments/ "Day in the Life of " each member that works together. Even departmentally, going to other departments together to see how roles/functions work.
More communication regarding transcripts received
At times things take a few days longer than we would hope for. Not always a concern but students are anxious to see their checklists complete and become concerned if they know a letter of rec or transcript is here but not loaded. When a transcript loads and we see we need to order another one it is frustrating at times because if processes (from the mail room, the institution we ordered the transcripts from, etc...) were more efficient - we would be able to communicate those updates to students much sooner.
I think PCE and GA has developed a good relationship. Both teams make every effort to be communicative, open, and follows through on their commitments.
Assist with market research, outreach efforts - both online and in person.
I would love to better under the day-to-day functions of Grad Admissions and how they interface with our department's processes. We are always looking for ways to streamline and understanding the ins and outs of what you do would help us too.
Graduate Student campus tours.   And a communication stream re: 1-20 processing for admitted international applicants. Also, adding TOEFL or language score into Salesforce (and reports).
I'm not sure yet. I would like to reflect on this idea.
N/A
Not sure. Semester meetings are very effective, perhaps meet more often?
GA has a good understanding of our department courses and students and offer support whenever it is requested.
It would be nice to have more ongoing trainings on our day to day processes, such as using SF, Xtender, Banner from an admissions point of view. What would be awesome if if Grad Admission, as a central processing hub, could share with each school best practices they have observed from the other schools and programs. This will help us be more efficient with our daily processes.

In what ways could the Admissions Services Assistant (Hazel or Mike) provide support to your department to strengthen cross-departmental efforts of serving prospective students and current applicants?
Hazel does a really fantastic job! I would need to think very hard to find areas for her to improve. She is a very good communicator and works hard to help our online programs be successful.
N/A
N/A
N/A
This is tough to answer. I think together, along with other graduate programs, we should meet more regularly to discuss application challenges and process improvements. Overall, I think things are going well and if we encounter challenges we communicate them to each other.
Provide us with feedback on what applicants are saying; send along information on best practices; keep us posted on backlogs so we can help move things along.
I have zero complaints about Hazel. NEVER LET HER LEAVE. She is fabulous!!!
develop a shared FAQ for prospective students completing applications that is constructed with faculty (application reviewer) input.
Same as above, I'm not sure yet because I haven't considered the possibilities.
N/A
I cannot think of anything. The support we receive is top notch.
N/A
If there is down time, emails or calls to incomplete applicants would be a great help.

Appendix E: Enrollment Management Exchange Invitation

Hi XXX,

You are invited to participate in Enrollment Management Exchange (EMX). This is an opportunity to join Graduate Admissions and learn more about our office systems and procedures. It's also an opportunity for you to ask questions about our processes.

Below is a tentative schedule:

1:00 pm
Associate Director, Overview of office and how we fit into the graduate admission structure at USD

1:15 pm
Administrative Assistant, Daily duties

1:30 pm
Admission Services Assistant, Role as the main point of contact for PCE

Appendix F: Invitation to Complete EMX Evaluation

Promoting Community through Caring Leadership: An Action Research Project

Hello <<FNAME>>,

Thank you for participating in the Enrollment Management Exchange (EMX) program. This was an opportunity to learn more about our office systems and procedures, ask questions, and promote a greater sense of community between our departments.

To help Graduate Admissions assess the usefulness of the EMX, please complete the following evaluation. Your answers will remain confidential and will be used to identify ways to increase collaboration across USD's graduate admissions departments.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScv1v1qILP2mMZQz_LAj0jAQO6t6223K7GDs6hnKx2SlsNCeg/viewform?usp=sf_link

Thank you again for your participation!

Warm regards,
Hazel J Claros | Admission Services Assistant
Office of Graduate Admissions | Manchester Hall 205
University of San Diego| 5998 Alcalá Park | San Diego, CA 92110-2492
Tel: 619-260-4524 | Fax: 619-260-4158

Appendix G: Online EMX Survey Script

EMX Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Graduate Admissions' Enrollment Management Exchange (EMX) program. To help Graduate Admissions assess the usefulness of the EMX, please complete the following evaluation.

Your answers will remain confidential and will be used to identify ways to increase collaboration across USD's graduate admissions departments.

1. The EMX content was relevant to my position.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

2. The EMX encouraged questions and discussion on material relevant to me.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

3. The EMX was useful in learning more about Graduate Admission's responsibilities and processes.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neither Agree or Disagree
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree

4. What was least valuable about the EMX?

5. What was most valuable about the EMX?

6. What changes would you recommend for the EMX?

Appendix H: Transcript of EMX Evaluation Free Response Results

What was least valuable about the EMX?
Seeing WebAdmit
Nothing, it was all valuable.
I did not find anything that did not add value
Nothing! If anything it was on my end...I had a time constraint that cut the EMX short. I found it all extremely valuable!
Wish there was a written out structure to follow along with as well as a quick run through live
I think it was all helpful. Even if it didn't directly connect to my role, it is good to learn what other offices do.

What was most valuable about the EMX?
Learning about Banner
Understanding timeframes for Grad Admissions and exactly what it takes on their end of the process.
The candid openness of work being done
I think most valuable was understanding the whole back-end process of what happens when a student submits an application. Really helped me understand all the complex pieces that go into "accepting" a student into the university.
Connecting the different pieces and parts/screens in Banner
It really clarified the admissions process and encouraged me to think differently about some types of software like xtender.

What changes would you recommend for the EMX?
N/A
None
No changes at this time
I would benefit from having a written re-cap...even if it was just a "Top 5" Takeaways from the EMX. It could be sent out as a follow-up email, and maybe a few lines added to customize it to the partner dept who participated (ie, what should they/their dept in particular take away from the EMX, if it's not in the more generic Top 5).
Reasoning behind processes and a bullet point notes page to follow along with/ask questions later/refer back to. Do a final "to do" list for action items (access to certain screens etc.)
No changes, except maybe to add more in depth or special cases.