

# GAINING MOMENTUM IN STUDENT AFFAIRS AND SERVICES IN CANADA: BRIDGING GAPS AND BUILDING FUTURES

CHRISTINE HELEN ARNOLD  
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

KATHLEEN CLARKE  
WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

It brings us great pleasure to launch the second issue in our double special issue feature on student affairs and services research in Canada. This double special issue arose through a partnership between the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education (CSSHE), our journal's home, and the Canadian Association of College & University Student Services (CACUSS). The two societies encouraged their communities to engage with this opportunity to showcase student affairs and services research in Canada. The enthusiastic response from new and established researchers and scholar-practitioners across the country allowed us to compile two full issues of contemporary scholarship of relevance to those researching, working, or studying in the student affairs and services field.

This editorial introduces the second issue of the double special issue feature. We invite readers to also peruse the [first issue](#), including an [earlier editorial](#) with a fulsome overview of this initiative and its purpose. The first issue includes the following articles:

- [Vanessa Ellis Colley et al.](#)'s article, "Experiences of Black International Graduate Students: Encounters of Racial Disparities Amidst EDI Rhetoric at a Canadian University"
- [Hend Shalan et al.](#)'s article, "Exploring Safe Spaces in On-Campus Residences: Perspectives of Black and Racialized Students Through Auto-Photography"
- [Emerson LaCroix and Janice Aurini](#)'s article, "How Can Post-Secondary Institutions Support Transfer Students? Lessons from Ontario"

- [Noah Arney](#)'s article, "What is Prohibited? Non-Academic Conduct Policies in Canadian Universities"
- [Manon Bergeron et al.](#)'s article, "Signalement d'une situation de violence sexuelle à l'université: l'importance du soutien dans l'expérience des personnes victimes"
- [Stephanie J. Waterman, Shawna Cunningham, and Michelle Pidgeon](#)'s article, "Understanding the Heartwork of Indigenous Student Services During the Challenging Times of Reconciliation, Decolonization, and Indigenization"

## Continuing Scholarship Through Mutual Collaborations

As Canadian faculty members situated within Faculties of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Wilfrid Laurier University, we—Christine Helen Arnold and Kathleen Clarke—have been working with CSSHE and CACUSS in mobilizing their recently signed Memorandum of Understanding. Constructed in 2022, the Memorandum of Understanding was initiated to promote connections between the organizations and their members. In addition to this double special issue feature, other examples of the strengthened connections arising from this Memorandum of Understanding include a conference gathering entitled, "Intersections of Theory and Practice: A Fireside Chat with Student Affairs Scholars, Teachers, and Practitioners," and a webinar series entitled, "Theory and Practice: A Month of Collaborative Learn-

ing.” The webinar series was delivered throughout May 2024 and convened faculty members, researchers, and practitioners in collaborative discussions and deliberations. The topics included International Education, Student Retention and Success, Mental Health and Well-Being, and Student Recruitment and Mobility.

Moving forward, we intend to organize conference sessions at CSSHE and CACUSS, sharing the articles showcased in this double special issue feature. Conference sessions will allow the expertise and experiences of the authors’ research to be shared in a live platform with a reach across Canada to encourage conversations and collaborations. We will also continue to foster growth in this area of research and are excited to see students and colleagues move the student affairs and services profession and the associated scholarship forward. We are gaining momentum in Canada, and this is something to be celebrated!

## Summary of the Articles in This Issue

For this double special issue feature, we encouraged contributions addressing multi-institution, sector, system, and nationwide research from academic and scholar-practitioners. Across the two issues, the articles cover multiple embedded concepts yet can be clustered meaningfully around five meta-research questions (Clarke & Arnold, 2022; Hanson & Denzine, 2000):

1. Who are today’s college and university students?
2. How do they experience post-secondary education?
3. What do students learn during their time in higher education, and how are they transformed?
4. In what ways does post-secondary education shape student learning and identity?
5. What organizational and communication structures define student affairs and services divisions, and what competencies and qualifications support the profession?

The articles in this second issue of the double special issue feature examine specific post-secondary student populations, conditions and challenges students experience, and the student affairs and services profession.

First in the special issue, we present four articles that focus on specific post-secondary student populations and their experiences and reflections. Lauren Goegan et al.’s article, “Pathways to Post-Secondary Success: Applying Situated Expectancy-Value Theory to the Experiences of Students With Disabilities and Their Peers” commences the special issue. The authors explore the growing number of students entering post-secondary education in Canada, with a particular increase in students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT), is employed to investigate how expectancy, value, and cost—along with participation in transition programs—relate to student outcomes, including emotions, skill development, grade point average, and overall satisfaction. This study examining how students—especially those with disabilities—experience their first year is pitched toward the goal of identifying supports and programming that best meet their needs and improve their chances of persistence and graduation.

The authors emphasize that psychosocial factors and institutional supports play crucial roles in helping students navigate the often-stressful transition from high school to post-secondary education. They also note that students with disabilities face unique challenges that can affect their educational experiences and opportunities. Students leave post-secondary education early for various academic, financial, and personal reasons despite institutional supports such as academic advising, counseling, learning centres, and disability-specific services aimed at improving retention and success. Regardless of increasing enrollment numbers and myriad institutional supports, students with disabilities remain less likely to complete post-secondary education compared to their peers, and first-year dropout rates are particularly high.

Continuing this discussion, Jeanette Parsons and Samantha Parsons' article, "Are Graduate Students with Disabilities Seen? A Study of Canadian University Websites, Policies, and Faculty Training Materials" extends the investigation of students with disabilities to the graduate level. This article explores the manner in which Canadian universities represent and support graduate students with disabilities. The review of 55 institutional websites, accommodation policies, and publicly available training resources for faculty members reveals that graduate students with disabilities are largely invisible within institutional narratives and policy frameworks. Accommodation policies vary widely in purpose, scope, and clarity, suggesting inconsistent approaches that may undermine equitable access and support. The study emphasizes the need for stronger coordination among student affairs units, graduate faculties, and equity, diversity, and inclusion offices to promote meaningful inclusion for graduate students with disabilities.

Although enrolment of students with disabilities has increased significantly—outpacing general university growth—systemic barriers persist, including stigma, fear of disclosure, insufficient accommodations, and burdensome navigation of academic processes, particularly for those with invisible disabilities. Despite federal and provincial legislative advances, the authors argue that meaningful inclusion remains elusive, and inadequate institutional responses do little to counter ableism. This context underscores the urgency of the authors' call to strengthen accessibility practices to better support graduate students with disabilities.

Moving forward, Thu Le, Elena Tran, and Phuong Tran's article, "Factors Influencing International Students' Willingness to Seek Support in Canada" widens the investigation to international students. This article adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a guiding framework to explore international students' decisions about whether and how to seek assistance. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 19 students, the authors determined that help-seeking is selective, cautious, and shaped by students' assessments of which individuals are most appropriate, trustworthy, or culturally

aligned. These international students matched specific problems to particular support sources, navigated multiple cultural frameworks simultaneously, and experienced intersecting identities that shaped their decisions in ways not fully captured by traditional TPB constructs. A central contribution of the study is the concept of "strategic non-help-seeking," which describes deliberate decisions to avoid formal support systems based on perceived costs, risks, and contextual constraints.

Although Canada has attracted millions of international students in recent years through its reputation and immigration pathways, systemic underfunding, reliance on international tuition, deteriorating quality, and recent policy caps have created uncertainty, stress, and marginalization. These pressures highlight a gap in existing research, which has focused on measuring social support rather than understanding the mechanisms shaping help-seeking choices—especially across diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and national backgrounds. In contrast, Le and colleagues examine the psychological, social, cultural, and institutional factors that facilitate or constrain help-seeking, with the goal of informing more equitable and culturally responsive support systems for international students.

Shifting our attention once more, Michael Woodford et al.'s article, "Examining the Academic Outcomes of 2SLGBTQ+ University Students in Ontario: Microaggressions and the Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being" focuses on 2SLGBTQ+ students. This article explores how microaggressions targeting students on the basis of sexual and gender diversity affect their academic outcomes, and the extent to which psychological well-being mediates this relationship. Drawing on a survey of 3,344 2SLGBTQ+ students, the researchers examine academic satisfaction and school avoidance for trans and gender-diverse (TGD) students separately from cisgender students within this population. Findings indicate that microaggressions are associated with poorer academic outcomes for both groups, and psychological well-being largely mediates these effects, with one exception for TGD students. The study emphasizes the differential experiences of TGD students, who face unique

challenges, such as misgendering and limited access to inclusive facilities, emphasizing the need for tailored support and resources.

Woodford et al. situate their findings within broader systemic challenges, noting that despite legal protections and institutional anti-discrimination policies, 2SLGBTQ+ students still experience marginalization, exclusion, and everyday microaggressions on campus. Most prior research on this topic comes from the United States, with limited Canadian studies, underscoring the need for context-specific evidence to inform policy and services. By examining the links between microaggressions, well-being, and academic outcomes, this study contributes to understanding how minority stress affects student engagement and development. The findings provide actionable insights for universities to foster inclusion, strengthen 2SLGBTQ+ supports, and address the psychological and academic consequences of microaggressions.

The second cluster of articles in this special issue focuses on the conditions and challenges students experience and the strategies and structures post-secondary institutions employ to meet students where they are and encourage their learning. Estefania Toledo and Katherine Borak's article, "Thriving Against the Odds: A Photovoice Study on Canadian College Students' Mental Health and Resilience Strategies" addresses the mental health challenges and resilience strategies of nine students enrolled in a Bachelor of Child and Youth Care (CYC) program at a polytechnic institution in Ontario. Using photovoice methodology, students acted as co-researchers, sharing their lived experiences through visual and narrative expression. Participants reported facing barriers such as limited access to mental health services, academic pressures, and food insecurity. Despite these challenges, they demonstrated resilience through self-advocacy, physical activity, community engagement, and connections with the Land. Framed by French et al.'s (2020) theory of radical healing, the study emphasizes the need for systemic change and shared responsibility among faculty, staff, and administrators to create inclusive and culturally responsive supports for student well-being.

The authors situate their findings within broader systemic challenges affecting post-secondary students in Ontario, including exclusionary campus climates, inconsistent assessment practices, and limited access to essential services. CYC students face unique vulnerabilities due to the relational and trauma-informed nature of their programs, which exposes them to secondary stressors while preparing them to support marginalized communities. By engaging students as co-researchers, the study amplifies authentic student voices and highlights strategies that contribute to resilience, including reliance on natural spaces, personal health practices, and relational support networks. The research provides evidence-based insights for post-secondary institutions seeking to enhance mental health supports, academic services, and overall student well-being.

Continuing this dialogue, Simon Bilodeau-Carrier's article "Les coulisses de la réussite universitaire : Les ressources de soutien universitaires sous l'angle de l'approche par les capacités" contributes to our investigation with the psychological health of students and mobilization of support services. Cette étude explore les principales transitions, accentuées par la pandémie de COVID-19, que les universités québécoises ont traversées, qui ont mis en lumière les défis liés à la santé psychologique des étudiantes et étudiants et soulevé des questions d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion. En réponse à celles-ci, les établissements ont élargi leurs services, notamment en ajoutant des suivis en psychothérapie, pour faire face à l'augmentation des besoins. Toutefois, l'accès à ces ressources reste inégal, particulièrement pour les étudiantes et étudiants provenant de groupes marginalisés, comme les personnes en situation de handicap ainsi que les étudiantes et étudiants autochtones ou de première génération. Cette recherche se concentre sur l'expérience vécue des étudiantes et étudiants afin de mieux comprendre les facteurs qui facilitent ou freinent leur mobilisation des services de soutien, dans le but d'évaluer l'efficacité et l'équité des mesures mises en place.

Le contexte historique et la pandémie ont exacerbé les défis pour certaines populations étudiantes. Depuis la Révolution tranquille, des politiques ont visé à démocratiser l'accès aux études supérieures, mais des inégalités persistent, notamment dans l'obtention des diplômes pour les étudiantes et étudiants de milieux défavorisés. La crise sanitaire a amplifié ces difficultés en imposant l'enseignement à distance et en augmentant les sources de stress psychologique, affectant particulièrement les étudiantes et étudiants marginalisés. Le ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur a tenté de répondre à ces besoins par un plan d'action et un renforcement des ressources, mais certains sous-groupes ont continué à mobiliser ces services de manière limitée. Cette étude vise donc à identifier les obstacles à l'accès et à proposer des améliorations concrètes pour rendre les services étudiants plus équitables et efficaces à l'avenir.

Building on this research, Victoria Burns et al.'s article, "Canadian University Students' Experiences of Addiction Recovery: A Pilot Study" extends the investigation to addiction recovery and the associated pathways for students. This article explores addiction recovery among 101 Canadian university students—a topic that has received far less attention than substance-use prevalence. Guided by a recovery capital framework, the study highlights students' diverse identities and the wide range of addictions they are recovering from, including alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, self-harm, and eating issues. Recovery pathways varied, with many students pursuing abstinence while others used harm-reduction approaches. Individual therapy, media resources, and peer groups emerged as the most helpful supports, while key barriers included fear of losing coping mechanisms and minimizing the severity of their issues. A significant majority of the population viewed campus environments as threatening to their recovery.

The study situates these findings within broader research on post-secondary substance use, noting the limited Canadian data on students in recovery. Collegiate Recovery Programs (CRPs)—which enhance personal, social, and community recovery capital—are

growing in Canada but remain far fewer than in the United States. CRPs can provide vital peer support, substance-free spaces, and stigma reduction, yet Canadian-specific insights are still scarce. By identifying student characteristics, supports, barriers, and recommendations (such as substance-free housing and improved access to services), this research underscores the need for recovery-inclusive health strategies and more robust, person-centred recovery resources on Canadian campuses.

Addressing another pertinent problem, Jason Laker's article, "Ending Gender-Based Sexual Violence on Canadian Campuses: Peer Educator Perspectives" highlights the impacts of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) on students. This article explores GBSV, a known widespread issue in post-secondary education, harming students' safety, well-being, and academic outcomes. Survivors often experience serious psychological effects (e.g., anxiety, depression, PTSD, and suicidality) as well as academic struggles (e.g., poor concentration, decreased performance, and difficulty persisting in their studies). Laker draws attention to the number of students who experience sexual assault or unwanted sexualized behaviour, with marginalized gender and sexual identity groups facing especially high risk due to inequitable and hostile campus climates. Such environments normalize harm and reduce accountability, allowing violence and microaggressions to persist. Although federal and provincial governments have introduced multi-level strategies, legal requirements, and major investments to prevent GBSV, overall incidence rates in Canada and the United States have not declined significantly.

In response to the ongoing crisis, post-secondary institutions have increasingly turned to peer educators (PeerEds) to support GBSV prevention efforts, relying on their shared student status to promote trust, engagement, and cultural change. This study examines PeerEds' motivations and experiences, finding that many are driven by personal trauma, institutional critique, and commitments to allyship. However, PeerEds also face emotional labour, secondary trauma, and institutional constraints that limit their effectiveness and place undue burden

on marginalized students. The study critiques universities' dependence on PeerEds without adequate structural support, calling for trauma-informed approaches, stable funding, and systemic reform. The authors call for further research to explore PeerEds' influence on campus culture, the role of administrators in perpetuating harm, and the ethical foundations of peer-led GBSV initiatives, emphasizing that meaningful change requires confronting institutional complicity and reimagining care on campus.

The final two articles in this special issue bring attention to a third topic, the student affairs and services profession itself. The first article highlights accessibility and accommodation services and the integration of service design principles with structured change management in this work. Sterling Crowe and Anna Ghoneim's article, "From Compliance to Co-Design: Transforming Accommodation Services at a Canadian College Through a People-Centred Service Design and Change Management Approach" documents how a large Canadian college transformed its academic accommodation services by integrating service design principles with structured change management. Using a mixed-methods approach across five semesters, the authors developed the People-Centred Systems Change (PCSC) Framework, which blends service blueprinting, systems thinking, and the ADKAR change management model (Hiatt, 2006). This framework supported the shift from a traditional medical model of disability to a social model, enabling staff to identify systemic barriers, iteratively redesign services, and involve students and faculty in participatory processes. The transformation addressed long-standing issues such as fragmented support systems, long wait times, rising student complexity, and increasing demands linked to mental health, accessibility, and equity concerns.

Crowe and Ghoneim's results demonstrate significant service improvements—including faster access to accommodations, strengthened faculty confidence, and increased staff capacity for meaningful student engagement—while offering a scalable model for institutions across Canada. Situated within broader national trends of growing student diversity, resource constraints, and heightened expectations for

accessible and equitable services, the authors argue that combining rigorous data collection, participatory design, and structured change management can meaningfully advance institutional support systems. Ultimately, the case contributes to emerging scholarship on accessibility and student affairs by providing a practical, theoretically grounded framework for redesigning student services through the lens of the social model of disability.

Hanson et al.'s article, "Navigating the Student Affairs Landscape: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Student Affairs Profession from Canadian Perspectives" concludes the special issue. This article explores the professional realities of student affairs practitioners (SAPs) in Canada by examining the reflective narratives of five scholar-practitioners. Using the Job Demands–Resources Model and Social Ecological Systems Theory, the study identifies three core themes: the often-unplanned career pathways into student affairs, increasingly complex job demands, and the ongoing construction of practitioner identity. Participants describe tensions between formal credentialism and experiential knowledge, the emotional burdens of equity-focused work, and feelings of precarity within their institutions. These insights highlight how personal histories, institutional cultures, and broader systemic forces intersect to shape SAPs' experiences, professional commitments, and well-being.

The study situates these narratives within the wider context of a rapidly professionalizing field. As student needs and institutional expectations evolve—driven by shifting demographics, rising mental health concerns, digital transformation, and growing regulatory oversight—SAPs are expected to possess a broad skill set ranging from intercultural competence to trauma-informed practice. Meanwhile, the push for advanced credentials risks reinforcing gatekeeping and undervaluing relational, community-based, and lived forms of expertise. By illuminating how practitioners navigate these pressures, the authors call for more inclusive, relational, and critically reflexive approaches to professional development, policymaking, and workforce sustainability in Canadian post-secondary education.

To round out the issue, we also have three book reviews. Our thanks to book review editor, Walter Archer, for over-seeing these reviews.

Collectively, the articles in this second issue of the double special issue feature provide a continued showcase of research methods, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and explorations of the students, conditions, and challenges that Canadian post-secondary institutions serve and professional practices that guide student affairs and services across campuses. This publication initiative has been a privilege, partnering with CSSHE, CACUSS, and colleagues across Canadian student affairs and services. We dreamed about this special issue feature for years and through the dedication of Michelle McGinn, Sharon Hu, and all those authors and reviewers involved, it has been successful!

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