

Public Abstract

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Exploring through Narrative Inquiry the Skills, Abilities, and Expertise Needed for Career Success

This study attempts to fill a gap in the literature by taking a new direction in the research of professional competency in student affairs through the exploration of professional stories of women midlevel student affairs practitioners. Through narrative inquiry, participants shared their professional life stories, including details regarding what skills, experiences, abilities, and expertise they believe have contributed to their individual career development, as well as the role gender has played. Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, 2006) as a guiding framework for the study, themes were identified from the findings and then interpreted through the KCM's components of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Findings from this study provide insight into how competence is viewed and achieved from the perspective of women midlevel professionals, as well as further our understanding of gender through the career development process in student affairs. Practical implications from this study reveal key aspects of professional development applicable to all aspects of the student affairs profession, including individual practitioners, departments and divisions at higher education institutions, and the professional associations that provide professional development and guidance to the field.