

CHAPTER 10

CASE STUDY

A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

**Amy Hecht, Mary B. Coburn, Arthur Sandeen,
and Brandi Hephner LaBanc**

Dan Marin was selected as the new vice president for student affairs and charged by the president to “create a bold new vision for student affairs.” He moved swiftly, created a comprehensive strategic plan, and revised the organizational structure. Shortly after he began implementing his plan, the Division of Student Affairs faced a \$3 million budget cut, which precipitated a second reorganization and the elimination of several programs. A year later, the division faced a second round of budget cuts; by this time, staff members were exhausted from the changes and budget cuts. The budget cuts threaten to undo everything Marin built in his first year.

Institutional Background

The University of the Southeast was established in the late 1880s as a coeducational state institution. In 2010, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Southeast as one of the top public institutions in the country. Southeast

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

enrolls 25,000 undergraduate students and 5,000 graduate students, and is led by Kathryn Perry, the university's 15th president. A Southeast alumna, Perry has promoted her vision to expand the university's academic reputation as a global institution by increasing its reach across the United States and beyond. This vision is fully supported by the board of trustees.

Division of Student Affairs Background

The Division of Student Affairs at Southeast University was led for 15 years by Vice President J. C. Smith. Smith was a warm person who focused her efforts on building teams and ensuring that staff felt comfortable in their roles. She spent the majority of her time building and maintaining relationships with staff, faculty, and students. Over the years, Smith fostered strong, positive relationships with most members of campus, including the board of trustees. Her leadership preference was to maintain the status quo rather than rock the boat. Staff described her as conflict-averse and determined to maintain harmony.

When Smith announced her retirement, President Perry conducted a national search for someone who could share her vision for the university. She did not have a specific direction in mind for the Division of Student Affairs, but she knew that student affairs could be doing more to advance the university's academic mission. The president hired Dan Marin and charged him to "Take the division apart and rebuild it with a bold new direction." The instructions lacked details, but the prospect inspired the new vice president.

The President's Charge

The president wanted to see fast results from the new vice president. Marin felt that pressure and sought to make rapid changes. During his first 6 months, he reorganized the division, established assessment protocols, and developed a strategic plan for student affairs. He formed an executive team to help with the reorganization; the team created a new organizational model with few remnants of the former model. The new

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

model symbolized broad change, shifted a number of reporting lines, created new cluster groups, and added new departments.

Marin also began the process of developing a strategic plan. He believed the image of the Division of Student Affairs was inaccurate and did not reflect the true value of its programs and services. He knew that he needed data to demonstrate the educational outcomes of these programs and services, so he made data collection and data-informed decision making key components of the strategic plan.

Staff members had doubts about the types of changes and grew uncertain about the future. Around the water cooler and behind closed doors, they complained about changes they believed did not make sense and about the lack of communication. They felt as though they did not know what was going on and did not understand the future direction of the division.

Deep Budget Cuts

Just as the division began moving forward, the state budget office ordered the university to make a 20% budget cut; for the Division of Student Affairs, that amounted to \$3 million. Marin adopted a people-first philosophy and made every effort to preserve jobs. He was committed to finding every staff member a place in the division, even if it was not in the person's current department. He looked at position vacancies and eliminated those that were not mission-critical. Then he reassigned staff members to enable mission-critical areas to function. People who retired were not replaced. Responsibilities essential to the strategic goals were reassigned. These changes gave birth to a new division structure that merged several functional areas and focused on doing more with less.

The wave of change—new vice president, new division structure, new strategic plan, and budget cuts—began wearing on the staff. The \$3 million cut left the division short-staffed and employees overworked, which affected morale. Most staff members felt uneasy, anxious, and unclear about the changes. Those who were transferred felt uncertain about their new

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

positions. Supervisors had to deal with the emotional fallout of so many changes in a once-stable division. Members of the executive team frequently dealt with questions about job security; they were careful not to make promises, as they did not know whether future budget cuts were pending.

In the next fiscal year, the university faced a second round of budget cuts. Student affairs was told to cut another \$3 million from its budget. This killed all momentum that had been gained by surviving the previous budget cuts and the division restructure. Staff were certain that this round of cuts would result in layoffs, and many people expressed concern about how long the division could survive at this rate of change. One staff member said, “After a certain point, more with less is not possible. It becomes less with less.” The executive team began to echo that sentiment. The bold new vision for student affairs fell victim to declining financial and human resources.

Response by Mary Coburn, Vice President for Student Affairs, Florida State University

Unfortunately, many vice presidents have faced this situation in recent years. While the wise administrator continues to seek ways to grow and achieve the vision during challenging years, multiple-year budget cuts inevitably take their toll on the ability to provide effective services to students and on staff morale. Staff can rally once in response to the need for significant reductions, but subsequent cuts tend to erode trust and make staff fearful for their jobs.

To analyze this situation and suggest steps to move forward, consider the factors that led to it. First, given the president’s charge to move forward quickly to implement a new vision, how did the vice president for student affairs introduce and create the needed change? Who was involved in developing the new vision? Did students, directors, and other staff have a voice in the process? Was there strong buy-in from division staff and students? Second, what process was used to implement the first round of budget cuts? Were the first cuts supported by data and a thorough needs analysis? Was there a clear communication plan for the budget situation

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

and the mandate to make cuts? Regardless of the strategies employed to reach this point, Marin will have to address three main areas going forward: communication; staff development and morale; and financial solutions.

Communication

All effective change processes require a comprehensive communication plan and a high degree of transparency. The plan must outline the constituency groups to be addressed, specify a timetable and the methods of communication to be used, and clearly state the messages to be conveyed. The most important aspect of a communication plan is listening; meetings with staff and students (individually and in groups or departments) to hear their ideas and concerns can be helpful and can raise issues and solutions that had not been considered.

Systems can be developed to provide a feedback loop that can be used in crises and in routine matters. Periodic electronic newsletters and state of the division addresses can keep staff and students apprised of issues facing the university and the division. Ad hoc committees, such as a budget crisis committee, can be used to tap the expertise of talented and creative staff. Even if everyone cannot be on the committee, everyone should have access to a source for information and feedback through peers. In situations like this, some institutions have sent out questionnaires or posted surveys online as a way for staff to recommend cuts and share ideas. This type of transparency clarifies the issues faced by the division and builds trust among those affected.

Staff Development and Morale

Given the fear engendered by repeated budget cuts, it is important to continue professional development and morale-building activities. The professional development committee must continue to provide professional and personal growth opportunities. With travel funds likely limited, the committee can draw on low-cost options such as webinars, 1-day conferences, and local experts. An on-campus conference can be organized featuring presentations that have been delivered by staff members

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

at professional meetings. Book clubs and discussion groups are other low-cost professional development tools.

It is especially important to maintain morale during difficult times. One model to consider is the FISH! Philosophy (Lundin, Paul, Christensen, & Blanchard, 2000), a set of work/life practices created by ChartHouse to improve organizational culture. The model includes four principles: (1) be there, (2) play, (3) make their day, and (4) choose your attitude. The concepts were inspired by observing the work culture at the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, Washington. In addition to morale-building activities, the staff development committee can arrange recognition ceremonies and social activities. One institution hosts a division bowling social every summer. Nothing builds camaraderie like laughing and playing together, and a little friendly interdepartmental competition.

Financial Solutions

The place to start in any budget reduction is the division's priorities outlined in the vision, mission, and strategic plan; herein rest the guiding principles for difficult financial decisions. Next, consider which division units and functions are aligned with the university's broader mission and strategic plan. Performance data on student learning outcomes, progress toward goals, and the impact of objectives are all helpful in prioritizing financial decisions. This information can suggest budget-cutting options for stakeholders to consider. Cost savings can be estimated for each option, and options can be evaluated against the guiding principles. Programs or activities that are not essential to the mission can be temporarily suspended and reestablished at a later date.

Along with budget reduction strategies, a menu of new resource options should be explored during tight budget times. New sources of funding can be generated through grants and gifts; if the division does not have a fundraising plan with dedicated development staff, this is the time to invest in that area. Shifting expenses to alternative sources of

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

funding—such as auxiliaries and student fees—may free up resources for mission-critical expenses. Evaluate whether student fees can be created, increased, or shifted to cover expenses traditionally covered by state funds. Finally, consider whether certain programs and services might work well through an outsourcing model; that is, operated and funded by a third party for a fraction of the cost.

Gain Support

Once all these options have been considered and the budget cuts are ready for implementation, the vice president should consult with the president to get support and buy-in on what might become controversial decisions. Inevitably there will be objections to the cuts; support from the president will make it less likely that the vice president's decisions will be overturned. When these decisions are confirmed, staff and students must be informed as dictated by the communication plan. Although no vice president wants to see budget cuts, it is important to convey an optimistic message: The division has been through tough times before and has survived.

Response by Arthur Sandeen, Former Vice President for Student Affairs, University of Florida

When assuming a new leadership role, it is impossible to accurately predict the challenges one might face. For many vice presidents for student affairs, financial cuts are realities of leadership positions in higher education. Although it was not discussed specifically in this case, one can assume that Marin did his due diligence to understand the financial landscape of the institution and of the division he was inheriting. Marin may or may not have had information on the differences between his leadership style and that of the former vice president for student affairs. However, what he might have discovered in the interview process would not have changed where he is now.

Marin has two main choices: resign or make things work. Resigning in the face of the insurmountable challenges might be understandable, but every leadership position includes challenges. Walking away could have

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

negative long-term career implications; hiring committees are likely to ask references about how potential candidates responded during difficult times. Marin's other choice is to take the steps necessary to lead the division through this tumultuous time.

Remain Optimistic

Marin might be tempted to blame himself for this situation. In hindsight, he might think he should have anticipated complications related to implementing a new vision as a transitioning vice president. He may wonder why he did not ask more questions about the institution's financial status. Leaders sometimes internalize institutional failures and lose confidence in their judgment. Marin could not have predicted the challenges he encountered, and he should remain optimistic about the future. The staff needs a confident, self-assured leader as they go through this period of uncertainty. Marin must understand what he needs to handle stress in this situation. The key is to remain optimistic.

Develop a Protocol

During the first round of budget cuts, Marin applied a people-first philosophy of maintaining jobs. While this may have been appropriate for the first round, it might not work for the second round. Marin and his leadership team must establish a protocol to guide financial decision making in good and bad times. This protocol should be used to make tough decisions. Preferably, the protocol would have been developed before a crisis occurred, for use in multiple scenarios. Difficult situations are good reminders of the importance of having a sound financial philosophy.

Make the Tough Decisions

Making tough decisions is part of a vice president's job. These decisions involve people's lives, and the outcomes are not always clear; most people would rather not have to make these kinds of decisions. In the second round of budget cuts, it might be necessary to set aside the ambitious strategic plan and abandon plans to restructure the staff. Layoffs

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

might be unavoidable. Marin cannot maintain a people-first philosophy indefinitely; at some point, basic programs and services for students cannot be reduced any further to maintain personnel. An internal sounding board—a small group of key staff members—can help Marin process tough decisions that will affect campus and division culture.

Communicate Clearly and Often

During times of change and uncertainty, it is important for the vice president to communicate clearly and often. Marin should be visible and personally invested in collecting feedback and addressing concerns; delegating those responsibilities to subordinates is not a good idea under these conditions. Even though cuts in programs or staffing levels are necessary, they can lead to anxiety in the organization; many staff members will wonder if their position is next. Clear and frequent communication is essential in transitions, especially transitions that include a crisis. The vice president should continuously share information about the university's financial condition and about the protocol used to make decisions. Be honest and transparent.

Response by Brandi Hephner LaBanc, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, University of Mississippi

Marin must forge ahead, but in a cautious and strategic manner. He must think about tackling this challenge on various levels. First, he must carefully push back with senior administrators as an advocate for the important work of student affairs professionals. Next, he must find his inner businessman and identify new revenue streams to replace depleted financial resources. Finally, he must work with his best asset—the employees—to find creative solutions to the challenges ahead.

Advocate for the Division

A pushback approach must be carefully and respectfully employed. As the vice president for student affairs, it is incumbent upon Marin to

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

advocate for the division in an effort to reduce or eliminate the second round of budget cuts. This advocacy must be well prepared and highly strategic. Specifically, he should remind President Perry of her vision and her belief that student affairs could do more to advance the academic mission of the university. Marin should highlight the division's ability to make that a reality by providing specific examples of important student affairs contributions that enable academic initiatives to succeed. Examples might include student retention rates, engagement of international students, higher academic achievement of involved students, or job placement rates achieved by the campus career center. Marin should focus on student affairs services, programs, and initiatives that correlate directly with student success or that make the university an attractive option for students and families.

Because Perry and Marin have a shared vision for student affairs and the university, it may be appropriate for Marin to respectfully remind the president that she initially told him to execute a bold new vision for student affairs. It is sometimes helpful to take leadership back to key decision points and to revisit philosophies and direction that were agreed upon. Given the extreme pressure the president is under and the number of conflicting agendas, sometimes clarification of the vision can be a helpful reminder. It is Marin's obligation, on behalf of the division and students, to remind senior leadership of the importance of student affairs in the campuswide vision.

Take a Business Approach

Marin must look at the business angles of these budget cuts. First, he should calculate the cumulative impact of both budget cuts on student affairs compared with the effect on other divisions. Has every division been asked to cut the same amount in whole dollars or percentage of the total budget? Second, this budget cut is in response to a reduction in state allocations; therefore, Marin should analyze what portion of the student affairs budget is funded by state funds. For example, if the division's total state budget is \$4 million, a \$3 million budget cut would represent 75%. From

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

this perspective, the budget cut could be overly detrimental to the division. Third, the impact of the budget cut on the delivery of programs and services has to be analyzed. A \$3 million reduction in the state allocation could require overhaul of departments, layoffs, and reductions in essential services and programs. It could also force significant fee increases or implementation of a pay-per-use approach. Neither of these options is attractive, and both will have adverse effects on students. Finally, from a business perspective, significant budget reductions can negatively affect the public image of the university and tuition revenue (student recruitment and retention). With these business-minded analyses of the budgets cuts, Marin may be able to reduce the secondary cut or request an exception.

Marin should outline contingency plans for raising revenue and reducing expenses in a worst-case scenario. Areas to consider in seeking to raise revenue in student affairs include: offering sponsorship opportunities that could provide funding for specific departments or programs; applying for grant or foundation funding for certain departments or initiatives; soliciting a specific donor with strong connections to student affairs and a high likelihood of giving; and charging fees for services to nonstudents in units such as campus recreation and the medical clinic. On the other hand, Marin should look closely at departmental budgets and determine whether expenses can be reduced by cutting programs or eliminating duplication. Times have changed, and expenses must be prioritized on the basis of outcomes rather than traditions. Some programs will have to be eliminated and services combined. Many institutions employ hiring freezes, require bulk purchases, cap travel expenses, and hire only work-study students when expenses need to be reduced.

Communication

How Marin leads his division through this financial crisis is important. He must remain highly transparent, as there is already a high level of uncertainty and anxiety about the future. Marin can attain this transparency by communicating frequently about approaches and outcomes. He

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

should employ multiple methods of communication: formal correspondence, meetings, newsletters, and e-mail. He should encourage staff to offer ideas and solutions in person or by e-mail. His people-first philosophy needs to be front and center; the goodwill he has gained will help him through this crisis. Sharing good *and* bad news is important; most people just want to know the truth so they can make decisions for themselves. Marin must continue to trust his gut instinct and be authentic as he leads the staff through the tumultuous times ahead.

Chapter Summary

This case reflects the complexity of the vice president for student affairs role and the impact environment and culture can have on a leader's effectiveness. At the core is a vice president who is attempting to respond to a new environment, meet the president's expectations, satisfy the needs of students, and manage staff expectations and anxieties. In an effort to establish a bold new vision, he moved faster than he normally would have; as a result, he did not garner the buy-in necessary for his team to deal with internal crisis. Massive structural changes followed by budget cuts overwhelmed the system.

- ① Whether or not the division is going through significant changes, a new vice president for student affairs must communicate frequently and be transparent. A new leader is a change for the division. While vice presidents might feel as though they are being redundant, people need to hear messages repeatedly. Express the brutal truth to help everyone understand the complexity of the situation. Let them know by how much the university budget is being reduced and the division's responsibility.
- ① Advocate for the needs of students and the organization. Understand the division's budget and funding sources. Determine whether the cuts will affect certain areas more than others, and adjust accordingly. Consider how to communicate with the

CASE STUDY: A Bold New Vision But Declining Resources

president and stakeholders about the impact of proposed budget cuts. Do not hesitate to work with the president or CFO to reconsider the percentage of cuts from student affairs.

- ① Create and communicate a vision for the future. Lead the division in a direction that reflects the new funding levels. Your vision should inspire and guide the division in its efforts to meet the needs of students. An inspiring vision can reinvigorate staff and bring new energy following the stressors of change.
- ① Pursue new revenue sources to offset budget cuts. Revisit old practices to identify any opportunities to save money or increase revenue. There may be opportunities to outsource certain operations or eliminate redundancies. If student affairs has not yet started a fundraising and development program, establish one that could provide funding for important initiatives.
- ① Maintain an optimistic outlook and help others do the same. Understand that some people are experiencing fear and anxiety; acknowledge those emotions and create a safe environment for expressions of concern. During this time of change, it is important to have a strong team that comes together to solve problems. Take time to find inexpensive ways to celebrate small victories.
- ① Renegotiate expectations with the president. The president initially requested a bold new vision for student affairs, but that was before the budget crisis. Meeting those vague expectations would be a challenge even without a shortened timeline and decreasing budget. The vice president should communicate the difficulty of accomplishing this task under the current circumstances.

The role of vice president for student affairs is highly complex. The position is full of tough decisions and competing priorities; nowhere is this more apparent than during budget cuts. The vice president must remain

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

flexible and responsive to the needs of the division and the culture of the institution. Certain problems must be approached with keen insight into the management culture of the institution. During challenging times, leadership from the vice president is crucially important for the division to accomplish its goals.

Reference

Lundin, S. C., Paul, H., Christensen, J., & Blanchard, K. (2000). *Fish! A proven way to boost morale and improve results*. New York, NY: Many Rivers Press.

CHAPTER 11

CASE STUDY

Crisis Response Protocol

**Amy Hecht, Johnetta Cross Brazzell,
Debbie Kushibab, Gail A. DiSabatino, and
Theresa A. Powell**

Martha Jenkins is a first-time vice president for student affairs at Martin University, a private suburban institution. The president made clear that one of her first tasks would be to improve the quality of student life and address a recent increase in enrollment. While Jenkins is trying to focus on that task, several student crises arise. Crisis communication is a challenge because of departmental silos and the lack of a university police force. Jenkins realizes that the Division of Student Affairs is not prepared to effectively manage these incidents and that perhaps she has been focusing on the wrong goal.

Institutional Background

Martin University is a private, comprehensive, suburban research institution in the northeastern United States. Founded in 1887, it offers degrees in business, education, liberal arts, engineering, and nursing. Martin is

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

well known for its cooperative education program and the high employment rate of its graduates. Martin has a diverse student body: 60% White, 14% Black, 10% Asian, 11% Hispanic, and 5% international students.

Jane Smith has been president of the university for more than 10 years. She is highly respected by the community and has accomplished a number of strategic initiatives to advance the institution. During her tenure, Martin has experienced unprecedented growth in enrollment, from 20,000 to 30,000 students. Smith has also worked to improve town-gown relationships by creating innovative business partnerships that have benefitted the university.

Overall, Martin is a relatively safe campus. Smith's predecessor dissolved the university's police department during a financial crisis and outsourced campus safety and security to the local suburban police department. This move has saved the institution millions of dollars and has resulted in a unique relationship between the university and the local police department.

Division of Student Affairs Background

The Division of Student Affairs is composed of a dean of students' office, student activities, campus recreation, counseling services, orientation office, housing and residential life, disability support services, and a career center. A majority of the staff have been at Martin University for more than 15 years. Collectively, the team of directors has a tremendous amount of organizational knowledge—they know how to get things accomplished on campus and how the politics of the institution work. However, many are not involved in national organizations or professional development opportunities, which contributed to a lack of knowledge of the broader issues facing student affairs and higher education. Many programs and services at Martin University can be described as “the way it has always been done.”

For the previous 10 years, Mike Mathis led the Division of Student Affairs. Mathis was promoted internally from his position as dean of students to serve as the chief student affairs officer. He was well liked and

CASE STUDY: Crisis Response Protocol

known for his laid-back approach; however, this approach did not allow for much change. Mathis was not a strategic planner and failed to anticipate the impact 10,000 new students would have on campus life. As a result, there have been rumblings from the student body about the quality of campus life and the availability of programs and services.

When Mathis resigned to accept a vice presidency elsewhere, Smith took the opportunity to conduct a nationwide search for a vice president for student affairs. The university hired Martha Jenkins, who had previously served as dean of students at a neighboring state institution. This was Jenkins' first vice presidency, and she was excited about the opportunity. Throughout the interview process, the president and others were clear about their desire that the new vice president address improvements in student life required by the increase in enrollment.

Quality of Student Life

Jenkins spent much of her first month on the job meeting with staff, students, and other stakeholders, seeking to understand all the opportunities to improve programs and services. She focused on the quality of student life and devoted the majority of her time to that issue. Her team was open to sharing their experiences and the history of the organization. Jenkins sensed that the team would resist major changes in their work, but she knew that change would be necessary.

About a month into her new position, Jenkins received a call from a concerned parent. He said, "I am sure you know what happened last night to my son. I figured you would want to talk with me, so I thought I would call." Jenkins was embarrassed to admit that she did not know what happened. She learned that the man's son had been airlifted from campus the previous night after sustaining a head injury while skateboarding on a main campus walkway.

After promising to look into the situation, Jenkins hung up and went to speak with her dean of students, Mack Adams. Adams was not aware of the situation but was not surprised that the Division of Student Affairs

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

had not been contacted. He responded to Jenkins' concern by saying that he was sure someone on campus was handling the situation. This did not satisfy Jenkins, who had assumed that her team would be in the loop and handling crisis situations.

Jenkins had experience managing crises in her previous positions, so she knew what steps to take. Although student affairs was not a first responder, such as the police or fire departments, she believed that the division should be notifying faculty and reaching out to students. She quickly met with the director of campus safety, Bret Daniels, who oversaw a small four-person office. As a retired police officer, Daniels had connections with the local police department and understood how it operated. He told Jenkins that communication had never been a problem before, and he did not understand the need for student affairs to receive notification. However, he promised that in the future his office would communicate better about incidents on campus.

Two months later, the local news broke a story of a Martin student killed in a car crash near campus. Neither Jenkins nor her team had been notified about the accident—they learned of the student's death on the morning news. Jenkins was furious; communication had once again lapsed, and she felt blindsided. Although the president had not specifically said that she wanted to know immediately about a student death, this had been common practice for Jenkins in her previous role.

Jenkins immediately called Daniels to gather more information. Daniels said that he had not received word from the local police and was also just learning about this accident. He was confident that the police would handle the situation. He said they were the experts and there was not much to be done by student affairs.

Jenkins had met the local police chief during her first week on the job. He seemed like a reasonable person who put student safety first. She thought she might be able to work directly with the chief to ensure that her team received information in the future. However, she was hesitant to go around the director of campus safety. Jenkins had only been at Martin

CASE STUDY: Crisis Response Protocol

University for 6 months, and strong relationships would be essential to her success. At the same time, she knew that student affairs had to play a greater role in crisis response.

Jenkins realized that she had been too focused on one goal and needed to quickly recover. She needed to address the crisis response issue, and she wondered what else she should have focused on. She hoped that she had not learned this lesson too late.

Response by Johnetta Cross Brazzell, Former Vice President for Student Affairs, University of Arkansas

Jenkins is not focused on the wrong goal. The quality of campus life, the increase in enrollment, and campus safety are intertwined and should be approached that way. All three elements should be tied together and presented that way to the greater campus community.

Redefine the Quality of Campus Life

Even as Jenkins addresses the crisis, she must start having redefining conversations with her vice presidential colleagues, especially the provost or chief academic officer and her student affairs staff. She must enlist the support of all the vice presidents, emphasizing their vested interest in developing a holistic approach to improving the quality of campus life. They should understand the benefits of such an approach and the negative consequences of not working together to develop one.

For her staff, Jenkins must define a student affairs philosophy centered on improving the quality of campus life. Such a focus will probably reshape staff roles. To reduce anxiety and resistance, Jenkins should include staff in the process of redefinition. The division's budget should include funds for staff to attend national organization meetings, where they will be exposed to professional development opportunities. To help facilitate this conversation, Jenkins should bring in a couple of external consultants.

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

Focus on Campus Safety

The campus safety issue requires immediate attention. Jenkins and her staff must be in the loop concerning student safety episodes. To whom does the director of campus safety report? Jenkins needs that vice president as an ally, and she needs to have the director of campus safety on the same page with her about how the campus should receive information about student incidents from the local police department. If she meets resistance at any level, Jenkins should involve the president. This issue is too important to let slide; the potential exists for legal liabilities if the campus continues to be late in hearing about and responding to student safety incidents.

Enlist the President

At all times, Jenkins needs to keep the president informed about her assessment of campus life and her plans for moving forward. When appropriate, she should enlist the president's involvement. Once Jenkins, Daniels, and Daniels' supervisor agree on an approach to the local police department, Smith should take the lead in approaching the city.

Response by Debbie Kushibab, Vice President for Student Affairs, Estrella Mountain Community College

Institutional fit is crucial to the success and enjoyment of student affairs work. For instance, a student affairs officer who has only worked for large research universities may have a difficult time adjusting to the mission of a small rural community college. While the work is the same, the student populations and challenges are different.

Just as important in a senior administrator's decision to accept a new job is position fit. A leader might be moving from one large university to another, but the position might be totally different in organizational structure, budget, staff, and roles of the chief student affairs officer. A leader should not make any assumptions when considering a position at a new college.

Clarify Expectations

Vice presidential candidates should take the time to create a list of expectations of the role and purpose of the position. This will enable candidates to have a productive conversation with the president during a second interview. Some administrators might think certain things are a no-brainer, like student affairs being informed of student crises. Candidates should add everything they can think of to the list, and then ask the president about his or her expectations for the position. This is a negotiation, and some issues can be resolved at this point. If some things cannot be changed or are considered to be nonnegotiable, at least the candidate can make an informed decision about the position.

Understand Current Issues

Along with any direction and vision that a vice president receives from the president, the vice president will also want to know about all current issues. This is the stuff a candidate will not read about on the institution's website or in the annual report. Candidates will want to know if any employees in the division are being disciplined, if there are any budget problems, and who is not speaking to whom.

While it is best to start with no surprises, that is probably unlikely. No matter how much research the successful candidate conducted to prepare for interviews, they will not discover everything. A candidate must decide what is most important to them in the role as chief student affairs officer, and determine whether both the position and the institution are a fit.

Do Not Assume That All Roles Are Similar

In this scenario, Jenkins spends her first few months focused on the quality of student life. She talks with students, staff, and the community. This takes time, but it is time well spent when it comes to formulating the division plan. Her misstep was assuming that her new position would be the same as her previous position. She did not understand that the role of the chief student affairs officer at this university did not include handling

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

student crises. She was furious with the director of campus safety for not communicating with her, and her anger probably confused him.

A better approach would have been to discuss the matter with the president. In this conversation, Jenkins could ask for changes in crisis management procedures. She could describe her knowledge and experience with crisis communication and management, and the role she played at her former institution. The president might not be familiar with the role of student affairs in dealing with situations that could have severe consequences to the institution if they are not handled properly. Jenkins could describe how a crisis prevention and intervention plan could supplement the efforts she is making to improve the quality of student life at Martin University.

Response by Gail A. DiSabatino, Vice President for Student Affairs, Clemson University

This case covers an issue that is not uncommon for new vice presidents: An institution does not always recognize its needs, and it takes a lot of probing to uncover hidden weaknesses or potential for crisis. Jenkins is not alone in discovering new challenges as the layers are peeled back. In starting a new position, it is important to seek to understand the culture and listen to stakeholders. Jenkins did the right thing by listening and learning before making any significant changes or introducing new initiatives. Through her communication efforts, she was able to prioritize improving the quality of student life as an important goal for Martin University's growing population.

Despite one's best efforts to gather as much information as possible, sometimes the only way to figure out what you do not know is to fall into it. I experienced some very similar situations in a position where housing was not a part of student affairs, and the school did not see the need to involve us in on-campus critical incidents. The police seemed to interact with student affairs staff only during office hours. It took patience to change the situation, and Jenkins should be prepared to tap into hers and to focus on building a culture of trust and transparency.

Use the Opportunity to Educate

Jenkins should remain confident that she has the experience necessary to navigate this situation and help the university better manage crises. The police chief and director of security may have good intentions and believe they have it covered. However, they do not know what they do not know. The vice president's job is to leave her ego at the door, allow others to gain confidence in what she has to offer, and get them to buy into why they need to collaborate with student affairs and other divisions to establish clear and broad protocols for dealing with critical incidents and crises. Providing examples of how she has dealt with parents and alumni in previous complex situations could help people understand the potential value of her collaboration.

Develop Your Staff

Jenkins should work closely with the dean of students, Mack Adams, to learn how critical incidents have been managed in the past and the role he played. He may or may not be comfortable with the current state of affairs. He may have wanted to take on more responsibility but did not know how to serve as a crisis manager. Jenkins should assess the dean's skill set, his perception of his role, and his interest or lack of interest in expanding his role. She will need Adams to play an active role moving forward.

Build Strategic Relationships

Jenkins should take the security director to lunch so they can get to know each other. She should describe her previous positions and the role she played in supporting students and families during difficult times. Jenkins should invite the security director to join a team that she will pull together to look at how the university and the community can best serve students during these times. She should ask him who he thinks should be at the table. If he does not mention the police chief, she should be sure to let him know that she will be inviting the chief to participate in the discussion.

Jenkins should make a list of the functions that student affairs can and should perform in dealing with critical incidents and crises. The list

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

does not have to be all-inclusive, but it should be clear enough that Adams, Daniels, and the police chief can see how central these activities are to student care, success, and development.

Jenkins should be sure to let the president know how concerned she is about the current state of affairs and why it needs to change. If she mentions the legal and public relations liabilities of not having a thoughtful and comprehensive plan, she will certainly get the president's attention and likely receive the support she needs. The president may also be interested in knowing how critical incident and crisis management are tied to enrollment and the overall student life enhancements she asked Jenkins to tackle. Jenkins should tell the president that she is reaching out to the police chief and the director of security, as well as the director of public affairs, general counsel, and appropriate academic administrators. The president will appreciate being made aware of the concern and the fact that Jenkins has a plan to deal with it. The president may be able to provide some insights into how things have worked in the past, how to deal with some of the players, and where Jenkins might find support.

Once Jenkins has talked with Adams, Daniels, the police chief, and Smith, she will be ready to bring the other players to the table. She may want to start with an invitation to a dialog or a webinar on crisis management followed by discussion. If this kind of universitywide conversation about crisis management has not occurred before, it is likely that many people will be grateful for being included. They have probably seen the need but did not know how to go about addressing it.

Response by Theresa A. Powell, Vice President for Student Affairs, Temple University

A vice president will always be solving problems. The objective of problem solving is to find a better solution, not the perfect solution, because no such solution exists. The approach to every situation or scenario is contingent upon the institution, the parties involved, the administration in charge, and the community and campus climate, as well as the short- and

CASE STUDY: Crisis Response Protocol

long-term goals of the university. And just as there are multiple solutions to various problems, there are also multiple problems unique to various universities. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of focusing on one problem at a time, seeing it through to resolution, and moving on to the next one. Like a juggler, we have several balls in the air at any given time. And, as any vice president knows, sometimes these balls seem like knives or flaming torches. Incoming executives should prepare in advance to manage the myriad issues they will face. They should not wait until Day 1 on the job to learn about reporting structures, staff expectations, crisis protocol, and so on. They must be familiar with current operating systems in advance. The best advice I can offer a new vice president is do your homework.

Confronting an Ineffective Practice

In this scenario, a new vice president is facing a common problem: lack of communication among departments. This is not necessarily deliberate; it may simply be the result of years of status quo. Often, when a new staff member joins an institution, he or she can see things with a fresh perspective, in which the status quo seems misguided or inefficient.

The new vice president may have strong ideas that have proved effective elsewhere, but she might not want to come charging out of the gate. She may see possibilities for connections and collegiality, but she might also sense hostilities or resistance to suggestions for change. A new vice president may wish to simply implement a new structure, but without buy-in from all or the majority of involved parties, she could be wasting time, energy, and resources. And finally, while she is tackling a particular problem, what other situations might be suffering from lack of attention? If the new vice president focuses on a single problem for a significant period, what other issues might fall through the cracks?

Before the job starts, the new vice president should research the institution as comprehensively as possible. More research might have yielded the information about crisis management that came as a shock to Jenkins. During her interviews, she could have addressed this lapse and stated her

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

expectation that the Division of Student Affairs would be involved in all student incidents. Unfortunately, once a vice president has been on the job for a while, there will be too much going on to focus on a single problem; spending time and energy on one issue will not be realistic.

Planning and Prioritizing Goals and Initiatives

If the vice president has neglected to do her research and clarify her expectations during the interview process, she is likely to find herself in the position described in this case study. She has already been working for several months, but at this point she needs to stop, take a deep breath, and reassess. Reassessment is a critical component of effective organization and action. Jenkins should start by listing all outstanding issues and concerns that require action. This is not an exhaustive list of every imaginable concern; it is a list of items that require direct action in the immediate future. Then she should prioritize the items. She should seize any opportunities to delegate; delegation will free up her own agenda and provide opportunities for mid- and senior-level staff to exercise leadership and gain experience.

Before Day 1, the vice president should have met with staff members, at the very least with her leadership team. During these initial meetings, she should have prepared her new staff for impending changes. The president conducted a national search for a new leader, so no one should be surprised to hear that changes will be made to help the division function better. One change is the policy toward professional development—the new vice president needs to clarify that involvement with national organizations and professional development opportunities is not optional, it is expected. At the same time, she should ask her staff, “What are your expectations for me?” In this case study, Jenkins has spent a month meeting with her staff. I would suggest more meetings. This time should be spent not just talking, but listening—really listening—so she can triangulate and make informed decisions about what the division is doing well and what items require attention. She should ask critical questions, as the quality

CASE STUDY: Crisis Response Protocol

of her questions will affect the way she is perceived. Asking critical questions will enable Jenkins to portray herself as a strategic thinker rather than simply an information gatherer.

Acting on a Major Initiative

One of the items on the list of priorities will be crisis management response. The quality of student life is affected by crises and crisis response. Jenkins has already devoted considerable time to this issue, but much of this time has not been spent effectively.

There are several roads she can take to address this issue. A crisis response protocol needs to be enacted at a high level and should involve all relevant parties (e.g., campus safety, communications, student affairs). When these parties meet to discuss the protocol, Jenkins can praise the work that has already been done and concentrate on building a team that is inclusive, collaborative, and collegial. This is the time for her to use her influence, not her power or authority. Devising a protocol could be a small and quickly realized goal, or it could require considerable time and effort. Because the issue affects multiple parties, the old system is firmly established, and the vice president is still fairly new, a task force might be the way to go. A task force involves representatives from all affected parties; asks for contributions and ideas from everyone on the committee; and yields a product that is collective. People get behind what they help create. The task force can use benchmarking data from peer institutions so that everyone can see the possibilities for success with alternative models.

In this case study, the vice president is playing catch-up. Ideally, she would have laid out her expectations for a crisis response protocol in her initial meetings with the president, the chief of police, the director of campus safety, and her staff. This proactive approach would have obviated the need for a reactive response following the two incidents. At the very least, she should have followed up immediately with Bret Daniels after the first incident to make sure that a different protocol would be followed in the future. In that meeting, she should have described her vision for how

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

future incidents would play out. Interpersonal relations can be tricky, but they should not be avoided or tiptoed around. A vice president has to have strong working relationships and clear expectations of her staff as well as her colleagues.

If the vice president attempts to implement a new reporting structure too long after taking office, she can expect to encounter a number of impediments to her progress. If she attempts to correct the crisis management response protocol unilaterally, she might face significant resistance and a lack of cooperation, if not outright ill will. However, if she acts proactively, works collegially, and asks for help from campus and community partners, her chances of creating a successful collaborative model are good. And while focusing on this issue, she should simultaneously keep her eye on other relevant issues, using her colleagues' expertise and availability to her advantage by making specific staff members responsible for these ancillary issues. If she has already gotten off on the wrong foot, she may face challenges, but they will not be insurmountable. Although she may have to play catch-up, she can rebound and refocus. Dwelling on our mistakes is not productive; we learn and develop from our missteps and use the knowledge gained as an opportunity for growth.

Chapter Summary

In this case study, Vice President Martha Jenkins made assumptions about the expectations for her new role. She focused on making strategic changes but did not examine areas in which processes needed to be developed, such as crisis response. Jenkins did not clarify procedures, such as emergency notifications, and relied too heavily on her experience. Making the assumption that a new institution handles issues the same way your previous institution did can get you into trouble. Past experiences get vice presidents hired, but quickly adapting to the new environment will keep them employed.

- ① One significant difference between past and current experience is the culture of the organization. Culture influences the way people operate. As a new leader, it is important to understand the

CASE STUDY: Crisis Response Protocol

new culture. Often those within a culture are not even aware of the nuances, so new members of the organization have to learn the culture through experience. However, by asking critical questions and observing behaviors, a new leader can pick up important clues about the organization's culture.

- ① It may be appropriate to clarify roles and expectations, especially if you see discrepancies between position descriptions and information you receive verbally. First, take your supervisor's style into account. If the president or provost tends to have a hands-off style, trying to involve him or her with details may not be the best course of action. However, discussing expectations with the president or provost can help you be successful. Even if you have been successful in this role at another institution, it is important to understand that expectations may be different in your new position.
- ① Redefine the role student affairs can play in crisis response, as well as the impact crises can have on the overall quality of student life. Through conversations like these, the vice president can understand more about the expectations of his or her role and express the necessity for student affairs involvement in crisis management. The vice president can paint a picture of a high-quality student life program and help others understand the importance of a comprehensive response to critical incidents involving students. These conversations can educate the campus community and help advocate for the needs of students.
- ① The vice president should build relationships with key players; in this case, the director of campus safety and the local police department. Through the relationship-building process, the vice president can share past experiences and knowledge that will increase understanding and respect for his or her role. Use these meetings to listen and try to understand the culture of the institution. Relationship-building is essential to a vice president's success.

EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS *in Student Affairs*

This case study shows that it can be easy to rely on past experiences and assumptions. It is important to ensure that expectations are clear, regardless of how comfortable you may be in the position. Often, the unspoken ways of doing things are not apparent until a crisis situation arises. The better you understand your new culture, the more likely you will be to anticipate how the organization will respond to any given situation. Do not become so focused on accomplishing one task that you ignore the larger picture. As vice president, you should remain confident of your ability but also respect the new culture and be intentional about the transition.