Silos in Higher Education Institutions: Shifting from Organizational Phenomena to a Practical Framework for Equitable Decision-making

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Silos in Higher Education Institutions:
Shifting from Organizational Phenomena to a Practical Framework for Equitable Decision-making

by

Mandi Sue Mizuta

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
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Abstract

As higher education has evolved, administrative and support functions have become more stratified and specialized, creating institutions with complex and compartmentalized organizational structures known as silos. These silos have a detrimental impact on institutions, employees, and ultimately the student stakeholders that they serve. Silos within higher education administration support services are readily acknowledged anecdotally; however, robust research to describe this phenomenon and actionable resources to address it are lacking. This multi-paper dissertation explores the theoretical implications and practical applications for using collaborative, intentional approaches to address what is argued to be at its core is a matter of equity. The first article, *Silos in student affairs: Moving towards collaboration utilizing organizational frameworks*, provides a theoretical explanation to the phenomenon of silos within higher education institutions and highlights their complexity. Because this is a multifaceted problem, it demands a creative solution that reaches for inspiration outside of the realm of education.

The second article entitled *Solving silos: Applying collaborative governance to organizational silos in higher education* explores the potential for interdisciplinary intervention from the field of Public Administration using the practice of Collaborative Governance (CG). The article offers an analysis of silo formation and CG and details a proposed original framework called the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework for use in higher education to advance transformational interdepartmental work.

In article three, *Deconstructing silos: Fostering equitable decision-making through intentional practice*, silos are examined through an equity lens, using critical theory to
highlight how silos perpetuate issues of equity amongst decision-makers and students. This article builds on how the proposed CSCG framework in article two may provide actionable methods for scholar-practitioners to address the inequity inherent within organizational silos in higher education. Through this dissertation, we learn that higher education practitioners must recognize that any transformative and sustainable strategic planning endeavors must consider addressing organizational silos as integral to student success and inseparable from diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
Acknowledgements

My doctoral journey began during one of the most chaotic and devastating years of my life. And if I had to describe the last 5 year that followed in one word, it'd be *pivot.*

My journey itself began with a pivot. After seeing my first attempt at a Ph.D. in Political Science crumble after the disintegration of my program after my first year, I pivoted to the Postsecondary Education Ed.D. after moving to Portland. Through the last five years, I've been faced with a wave of pivots: career transitions, family crises, the loss of loved ones, seeing multiple research plans fall apart outside of my control, excitedly purchasing our first home, and of course, a global pandemic and radical upside-down societal calamity laying bare the world's broken systems. Constantly pivoting and navigating a doctoral program in the midst of it all has been both exhausting and euphoric. My goal has been to remain agile and soft hearted yet strong spirited, resolute to see this through to the end. In this moment, I am safe; I am grounded. And I am immensely thankful for precisely where I am in the universe right now and ecstatically hopeful for my next pivots post-doctoral life.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the love and support of my dear husband, Jon, through this process. It was an honor to support him through his doctoral journey some years ago. Because of his experience, he knew how to encourage and comfort me in ways that only someone who had been through the isolation, elation, self-doubt, and weariness of this process could. He repeatedly reminded me that it was an honor to support me as I did him, which was so special and affirming. Oliver, our sweet
Goldendoodle, was an absolute salve to my soul and cared for me through the doctoral journey in the sweet ways that only the most faithful canine companions can. His constant presence and encouragement, refusing to even go to bed in order to stay with me during late night writing sessions, was priceless.

I also remain so grateful for the dear friends and family that held me through this process. They were a source of constant encouragement and understanding, which carried me in times when I lacked belief in myself. It's so easy to feel self-absorbed during the height of the dissertation process; I'm so thankful you were patient, kind, and loving to remind me of the strength of our bonds and of my value. What riches I have in those around me who believe in me and my potential!

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Introduction

Higher education organizational structures are rapidly evolving and becoming ever more complex. In order to meet the economic and educational demands of providing postsecondary education within the 21st century, colleges and universities are being forced to reconcile their individual missions with the financial, technological, social, and political realities of the current state of higher education. As a result, the work of higher education is involving more external and internal stakeholders who come with their own vast array of interests and priorities.

The rise of these varied and sometimes competing priorities beg that we critically examine the organizational framework in which higher education institutions structure themselves to best carry out their missional responsibilities. As Tierney (1988) highlighted in his groundbreaking work on organizational culture in higher education, in order to make decisions in this age of complexity and fragmentation that colleges and universities face, “leaders must have a full, nuanced understanding of the organization’s culture” (pg. 5). Not only are institutions influenced by the aforementioned external realities in higher education, they are driven by internal organizational dynamics that have been birthed through a shared history, values, and goals. Tierney (1988) further elaborated that “[a]n organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level.” (pg. 3)

Although traditionally known as change agents within society, higher education institutions are too often characterized as internally resistant to structural change (Kezar,
2014; Lloyd, 2016). However, as Lloyd (2016) asserts, the set of challenges that exist today demand leaders rethink through the overarching culture and organizational structures and norms that are foundational to the academy. What must be challenged and changed within our organizational structures in order to best serve institutional mission and ultimately produce student success in this increasingly complex age of higher education?

The term silo is often used to metaphorically depict the phenomenon of the interrupted flow of authority, accountability, decision-making, information, and/or communication within an organizational structure and is increasingly utilized in describing higher educational institutions’ struggle to adapt to this ever-evolving and complex environment. Within the context of organizational theory, a siloed organization may employ a systematic, hierarchical approach with defined roles, responsibilities, and an overarching chain of command that passes down information (Stone, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012).

Psychologically, silos are often used by participants to encapsulate “the cognitive and emotional quality of their often fragmented and constrained personal (and interpersonal) engagements at work” (Diamond, et al., 2004; Cilliers and Greyvenstein, 2012).

Peter Senge (2006) observes that silos can be formed out of service delivery that is finds initial success but then becomes overconfident, too specific, and/or over-protective, leaving the unit ill-equipped and lacking the agility to tackle challenges. According to Briody & Erikson (2016), within each internal organizational unit of the structure, unique processes, practices, and perspectives are internalized and isolated
through their organizational structure, resulting in the “impenetrable” cultures. These cultures are characterized by insulated and/or circular channels of communication and information exchange, separate and distinct policy and practices, and competing values and goals (Senge, 2006), and become so developed and reinforced over time that collaboration is consciously or unconsciously considered unnecessary – silos within a larger organizational structure.

The aim of exploring silos in student affairs is to best understand how these challenges can be remedied to ensure that student success remains the preeminent concern of colleges and universities. Organizational silos within student affairs departments impact student success by causing fractured decision-making processes, inconsistent information exchange, and broken lines of communication both interdepartmentally and with students, which results in issues around academic decision-making, resilience, and retention. Through this multi-paper dissertation, I argue that ultimately organizational silos are issues of equity that further marginalize both students and staff who do not possess the power or privilege inherent by the white, patriarchal structures of academia. It will take intentional, sustained action and continuous self-assessment to ensure that student services professionals successfully navigate these organizational silos and practice the transformation they so ardently champion.

This project constructs this argument through a series of three related, but separate articles. First, I analyze organizational silos in higher education institutions through the lens of organizational theory. Analysis shows silos have developed as a result of a variety of complexities that have transformed educational delivery within the 21st
century. Left unchecked, silos impact the organization, its employees, and ultimately the student stakeholders, which the article delves into. In order to best understand, and therefore address these impediments to collaboration across departments, Article 1 provides an in-depth examination and critique of silos through the lens of systems-based approaches of contingency and complexity theory and the relational notion of Senge’s Learning Organization and learning-based theories of constructivism and connectivism. Through this discussion, we learn that efforts to address siloed student affairs departments must emphasize relationships, continual learning, innovation, and equity.

The second article of the series will build off Article 1’s observation that at its core, silos are an organizational problem that must be undertaken with acknowledgement of competing priorities, multiple stakeholders, unique environmental complexities, and interconnectedness. Article 2 will further explore how in a student affairs environment, when interacting across departments, we must employ a collaborative, creative approaches that stress strong relationships and clear communication in order to ensure equity and access remains at the forefront. As we work to make colleges more inclusive and supportive and seek to remove barriers to student success, we must consider how to form agile, efficient organizational structures that consider clear means and methods of communications both internally and externally as vital to equity, sustainability, and retention. I propose that Collaborative Governance (CG), a decision-making framework from the public administration sphere, is an exceptional fit to be applied to silos within higher education. This article looks at CG in both concept and practice, demonstrating how it is ripe for application within the context of this study. Based off these
observations, the article offers up an original five phase collaborative governance-based framework, called the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework. The framework walks higher education practitioners from conception to implementation in forming their own transformative interdepartmental collaborative governance body that conducts decision-making work across silos. The article also offers up guiding principles and practical considerations for building the legitimacy and sustainability of the resulting collaborative governance body’s work within higher education institutions.

The third article of the multi-paper dissertation hones in on the urgency to address student silos as a matter of equity and inclusion. At their core, silos are inequitable, characterized by preserving and perpetuating exclusivity and reinforcing control for the privileged. This article explores silos as a problem of inequity by examining the formation of organizational silos and their impact on staff and students through the lens of critical theory. Using the lens of critical theory for this analysis highlights how silos perpetuate inequity for staff within these organizations. Critical theory is also helpful in delving into the inequity bred within organizational silos and their power dynamics and fractured decision-making processes. Silos cause inequity for students by reinforcing the notion of the hidden curriculum” and impacting retention and persistence through the pervasive silos that create barriers to resources and effective communication. Further analysis focuses on how collaborative governance and the five phase CSCG framework proposed in Article 2 practically address equity and inclusion concerns in its attempts to bridge silos within higher education institutions. By illuminating the inequity of organizational silos within HEIs and highlighting actionable tools such as the CSCG
framework, this article will show that transformative and sustainable strategic planning endeavors must consider institutional organizational structures and service delivery as inseparable from diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

The multi-paper series concludes by offering a general discussion of implications of addressing organizational silos in light of the impacts of COVID in higher education. This discussion also offers considerations for further scholarship and research on this topic in efforts for practitioners and scholars alike to further challenge organizational silos in higher education institutions, particularly within student support. A prioritized goal of this dissertation is to provide both a theoretical understanding to the phenomenon of silos that bridges into actionable considerations to can impact praxis. In order to affect change, challenge siloed organizations, and impact decision-making, there must be action to back up theory. Through this work, may higher education practitioners recognize that any transformative and sustainable strategic planning endeavors must consider addressing organizational silos as integral to student success and inseparable from diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
References


Article 1 - Silos in Student Affairs:
Moving towards Collaboration Utilizing Organizational Frameworks

Abstract

As higher education has evolved, administrative and support functions have become more stratified and specialized, creating institutions with complex and often compartmentalized organizational structures, often referred to as silos. This article, the first of a three-part multi-paper dissertation, explores the formation of silos within higher educational institutions, particularly within student support services. Analysis shows how silos have developed as a result of a variety of complexities that have transformed educational delivery within the 21st century and how silos impact the organization, its employees, and ultimately students. In order to best understand, and therefore address these impediments to collaboration across departments, this article provides an in-depth examination and critique of silos through the lens of systems-based approaches of contingency and complexity theory and the relational and learning-based theories of constructivism and connectivism. Through this discussion, we learn that efforts to address silos in student affairs must emphasize relationships, creativity, continual learning, innovation, and equity.
As higher education has evolved, the administrative and support functions have become more stratified and specialized, creating institutions with complex and often compartmentalized organizational structures, often referred to as silos. These tangled organizational webs that frequently characterize modern higher educational institutions result in negative impacts, and sometimes even danger, to students, staff, and the institution as a whole (Calhoun & Weston, 2012). One of those most significant, illustrative cases of the impacts of silos in higher education is the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia at the hands of Seung-Hui Cho (Lake, 2011), which killed 32 and wounded 17.

An immigrant from Korea, Seung-Hui Cho from an early age was seen as a medically fragile, socially withdrawn child (Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2009). Cho suffered from mental illness and learning difficulties starting in middle school, playing out his suicidal and homicidal ideations in his school writing assignments. His parents, school interventionists, and community human services agents engaged Cho in vigorous therapy, psychiatric and medicinal intervention, and an individual educational program (IEP). Cho’s graduation from high school with a 3.5 GPA was heralded by his support structure as a success story (Calhoun & Weston, 2012). However, this success was immediately challenged by Cho’s decision to attend Virginia Tech, a large college four and a half hours away from home. His parents and counselors feared that Cho would not be able to get the individualized attention and guidance that had perpetuated his high school success.
Unfortunately, these fears were founded. Although his high school counselors equipped him with information for support contacts at Virginia Tech, Cho did not reach out. His high school records did not indicate that Cho received any special services, nor was this self-disclosed in the admissions process. Privacy laws prohibited any record of Cho’s medical records to be transmitted to Tech via his high school, medical providers, or community health providers (Calhoun & Weston, 2012; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2009).

The Virginia Tech Review Panel (2009) goes into great detail about the various incidents that marked Cho’s college experience, and most notably for this article, the variety of campus departments that had information about his erratic behavior but failed to piece together the entire puzzle. Cho had an unremarkable freshman year, but started his sophomore year with a move off-campus and a change in major to English. He began writing prolifically in his spare time yet performed poorly in his English classes. Moving back on campus, his junior and senior year was marked by numerous events that put him on the radar of various departments and individuals at Virginia Tech. His relationships with his English professors were disturbing, marked by belligerent confrontations that were further intensified by violent, gruesome writings that expressed disdain for his classmates. Students were fearful to come to class, and one of his professors approached the department head and threatened to resign unless Cho was removed from her roster. The department head reported this specific threat to the Dean of Student Affairs, and together they made their way to the university’s Care Team comprised of the dean, the director of Residence Life, the head of Judicial Affairs, Student Health, and legal
counsel. The Care Team considered the matter resolved with the class change, and no recommendations were made for further support. In that semester, Cho also had several concerning incidents involving his roommates in the dormitory and stalking female students. Several individuals in Resident Life, from resident advisors to the director, and Judicial Affairs were involved in adjudicating these matters. Campus police became involved in one incident after a female had filed a complaint, and police verbally warned Cho to cease contact. After this event, Cho expressed suicidal intentions, which were reported to campus police and subsequently resulted in an involuntary committal with a community mental health provider. None of these players ever brought any of these incidents to the intradepartmental campus Care Team.

In the aftermath of Cho’s devastating actions, both the state and federal reports of the massacre specifically cited Virginia Tech’s silos, particularly within the student affairs, as a direct cause of this tragedy (Department of Health & Human Services, 2007; Virginia Tech Review Panel, 2009). As illustrated above, Cho had a documented history of incidents with several departments; however, at no time was some person or entity able to receive the full scope of information surrounding him and put the pieces together. While the university’s Care Team on its face was designed as an interdepartmental effort to handle student issues, it operated more as an adjudication board, where individual student affairs departments would bring cases for larger student affairs consideration. The Care Team did not offer opportunities to share information, collaborate, or strategize to provide holistic, informed solutions. Virginia Tech’s Care Team also had no mechanism for follow-up, which certainly would have been another check on Cho’s continued poor
behavior since only one initial incident made its way to the team. As federal and state investigators delved into these silos, a common refrain was that that colleges and universities must see silos as a threat to student success and institutional well-being (Calhoun & Weston, 2012).

The findings of policy makers, scholars, and student affairs professionals in light of the Virginia Tech massacre as summarized in the United States Department of Health and Human Service’s Report to the President on issues raised by the Virginia Tech tragedy (2007) were unanimous and unequivocal in recognizing that organizational silos must been addressed. While recommendations for better communication and improved professional development were given, what was lacking was any recommendations on how to solve for silos on an organizational level. As Calhoun & Westin (2012) surmised, the anecdote is rethinking our organizational structures to allow for collaborative decision-making and clear communication within the organization. In order to determine how to accomplish this goal, we must first examine the development of siloed higher education organizational structures. This article will delve into silos within higher education institutions and particularly examine through the lens of organizational theory just how these silos are formed and perpetuated within student affairs. By better understanding the dynamics at play in this siloization, we may then begin to explore how to best address them to ensure they do not threaten the success and safety of students, staff, and higher education institutions (HEIs) as a whole.
What is an organizational silo?

The interrupted flow of information and communication within the organizational structure is one common manifestation of higher educational institutions’ struggle to adapt to this evolving environment. Thought to have first been used by Neebe (1987) in relation to the form and function of grain silos, the metaphorical term “silo” was originated by “organizational participants to describe the cognitive and emotional quality of their often fragmented and constrained personal (and interpersonal) engagements at work” and to encapsulate perceived organizational boundaries (Diamond, et al., 2004; Cilliers and Greyvenstein, 2012). Embedded within this notion of a silo is a mechanistic, hierarchical approach to organization theory, with defined roles, responsibilities, and an overarching chain of command that passes down information (Stone, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Diamond and Allcorn, 2009; Cilliers and Greyvenstein, 2012).

Sometimes, as Peter Senge (2006) pointed out, silos can be formed out of service delivery that is initially successful but then becomes overconfident, overspecializes, and/or over-protective on its previous success and fails to adapt or innovate in light of new challenges. Within each internal organizational unit of the structure, unique processes, practices, and perspectives exist (Briody and Erikson, 2016). Through the internalization of these functions and because of the inherent insulation that is perpetuated through the organizational structure, “impenetrable” cultures referred to as silos are formed (Briody and Erikson, 2016). As a result of these silos, information exchange is choked, processes and practices are independent and distinct, and values may conflict (Senge, 2006). Rather than departments sharing a knowledge base, common
policies and procedures, or even cultural norms, these departments or specific roles become organizational microcosms in and of themselves – often referred to as organizational silos. These microcosms are so highly structured to support their own functions that collaboration and information sharing is consciously or unconsciously considered unnecessary – silos within a larger organizational structure.

Relatedly, a siloed mindset or silo mentality occurs when employees with a shared perception of reality internalize organizational barriers, that may or may not physically exist, thereby impacting behavior and relationship making (Diamond and Allcorn, 2009; Diamond et Al., 2004; Ashforth et al., 2008). This silo mentality perpetuates an us versus them, protective mentality that further restricts relationships, communications, and organizational outcomes across boundaries (Tajfel, 1982; Joshi et al. 2010; Salas et al., 2015; McNeil et al., 2013). The specialized term information silo relates to the exchange of digital and/or decision-making information amongst stakeholders where departments, their policies, and/or their technology systems become so insular from each other that information is not, or sometimes depending on technological barriers such as software programs - cannot, be widely shared amongst others within an organization (Cilliers and Greyvenstein, 2012). Departments and even specific roles become so insular that information is not widely shared amongst others even within their own organizations.

Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012) noted that generally, silos are perceived as organizational disfunction. Greenberg and Baron (2003) also acknowledged that silos connote fragmentation and disconnection from leaders to subordinates and/or department
to department, which is indicative of a lack of trust, loss of agency, poor communication, and loss of respect. With their trademark psychological take on the topic, Diamond & Allcorn (2004, 2009) expanded on this criticism by also noting that silos cause differentiation, compartmentalization, and segregation amongst organizational participants. Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012) further added to this criticism and metaphorical significance of silos by asserting that the phallic physical shape of the grain silo represents the domineering power dynamics, in-group versus out-group thinking, and projection often at play within a siloed organization. However, we must acknowledge that some structure is essential for organizational function (Brattström et al., 2012) and that silos, or what Marion et al., (2016) refer to as “arrangements that resemble” silos, can be useful in safeguarding against distrustful partners and interprofessional conflicts (Forsten-Astikainen et al., 2017). This article will choose to focus on the critical implications of silos as indicative of organizational disfunction and relationship fragmentation.

**Silos in Higher Education Institutions**

The Higher Education Institution (HEI) is fundamentally a social organization, with relationships amongst its staff, students, and stakeholders ever-evolving as the needs of the environment change. In large social organizations, through growth within its participants, hierarchy is used with the goal of creating predictability and control (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). As a social organization evolves and hierarchies grow in numbers and nuance, they splinter into either parallel or interdependent social organizations. Interdependent social organizations lie in distinct places within the
hierarchy of the organization. However, they share culture, communications, and information, working in tandem to pursue a shared organizational mission. Parallel organizations are characterized by departments or structures that are separate and distinct from one another, yet they inhabit the same sphere of organization. Amongst parallel organizations, each subset or department has its own insulated culture where communication and information stay internal, and missions or best practices are service-specific. Parallel organizations therefore can be considered those social organizations that are comprised of silos.

Within these social organizations of American colleges and universities, silos are created by expanding services and administrative staff to meet the needs of a 21st century student. Unfortunately, as the organization has expanded, parallel organizations have formed characterized by duplication of resources, increased administrative costs, and growth in bureaucratic complexity (Blumenstyk, 2015; Kirk, 2014; Moran, 2015). Administrative structures have ballooned due in part to:

- the rise of corporatization and embrace of more corporate style operations models
- increased diversity in student populations
- multiple modalities and methods of learning delivery
- the use of third-party servicers and contractors
- increased academic & social support services to meet the growing complexity of student needs
• increased institutional, state, and federal accountability measures
  (Andrews, 2006; Brown, 2017; Garza Mitchell & Maldanado, 2015; Levy & Polnariev, 2016; Manning, 2013)

As the workforce grows to meet the unique and varied functions of a university, specialty silos are formed with their own best practices, instruments, language, professional organizations, and measures of success and accountability (Brown, 2017). These silos lack engagement and even often possess conflicting definitions of foundational terms and missions (Keeling et al., 2007).

There’s a growing recognition that organizational silos impact the success of student success initiatives. Levy and Polnariev (2016) asserted that solid objectives struggle to prevail in spite poor systems: “…regardless of how well-intentioned a particular student success initiative, if it operates in isolation (in a ‘silo’), the likelihood of that program having significant and sustained positive outcomes is greatly reduced, if not eliminated” (p. 4). The emphasis on systems thinking in student affairs was a prominent thread within the proceedings of the Department of Education’s Evidence-Action-Innovation College Completion Symposium in 2012. Within the symposium report, Choitz commented that “We need to move from ‘best practices’ to ‘best processes.’” (p. 8). Tinto added that “[i]mproved completion does not happen by accident. It requires a coherent, structured, and proactive approach that does not leave student success to chance.” (p. 8). This urgent emphasis of intentional systems thinking and interdepartmental collaboration was summarized in this finding:
Collaboration between faculty and other campus offices, especially student affairs, is key to increasing student success. Developing and institutionalizing these relationships are critical. Working together to create integrated systems and policies that promote student success contributes to the effectiveness of campus efforts in promoting completion. Knowing the resources that are available, which are often in the student affairs division, and how best to direct students to those resources, allow faculty to play a more effective role in the student support system. In addition, advisers, coaches and mentors sometimes know that students are having academic problems before faculty members and can be effective in relaying concerns and early warnings. Encouraging frequent and ongoing collaboration between and among these units builds relationships, which lead to information sharing that can positively impact student success. (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education, 2012, p. 21)

Students are information centers in which separate and distinct departments funnel their own streams of specialized information directly into, where the student then has to distill together all of these information sources and make meaning for themselves, akin to the act of putting together a puzzle, but with infinitely higher stakes. Through this process of information gathering and construction, we see vast consequences for marginalized student populations. Those “in the know” have a significant advantage navigating the bureaucracy and its specialized language and finding allies to assist them on their journey. Castleman et al. (2015) acknowledged that navigating this complex information and corresponding bureaucratic complexity often creates cognitive overload
that results into procrastination, choosing the path of least resistance, channel factors (easy and obvious path), and simplifying strategies such as deferring to what is immediately accessible. For international students, first generation students, English as a Second Language speakers, and those with learning differences, navigating these siloed systems and constructing information to make crucial decisions about their education becomes a significant barrier to persistence. Much has been said about the notion of Phillip Jackson’s term (1968) “hidden curriculum” that persists within education. The concept of the hidden curriculum further reinforces that education is inherently social, and that through navigating its systems and social structures, underlying values, norms, and behaviors are learned and affirmed. The pervasiveness of organizational silos adds further to the hidden curriculum by creating more layers of complexity to the systems in which they are forced to navigate, and further fracturing lines of communication and information vital to student success. These silos, and the hidden curriculum at large, significantly undermine equity and inclusion and harm student success.

Focus on Impact to Student Support

While organizational silos are prevalent across the entirety of higher education institutions and within each individual mission (e.g., academics, development, alumni services, and student affairs), this article highlights the existence of silos in student affairs between its myriad of services, departments, and programs. It must be noted that the term student affairs is highly contextually subjective. What function or department may fall under the service area of student affairs at one institution may be grouped under the umbrella of academic services at another. Some institutions may use names such as
student services, student development, or student support for these service functions or
might choose to break out student services, financial services, and/or academic services
as separate and distinct departments with vastly varied organizational structures. In a
2014 report, NASPA affirms this difficulty in navigating the “diverse and often unique”
manner by which HEIs define student affairs and identifies at least 39 functions that
various leadership across the country identified as falling under the student affairs area
(NASPA, 2014).

To alleviate the complexity and uncertainly of this definition, a universal
understanding is necessary for the sake of this article. The Counsel for the Advancement
of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education identifies forty-seven distinct functional areas
and 3 cross-functional areas that fall under the umbrella of student support programs
(2019). For this study, I adhere to the 2012 CAS outline of student support services as
academic advising, academic support services, admissions, campus activities, career
services, counseling, disability services, financial aid, Greek life, housing and residential
life, international student affairs, judicial services, LGBT services multicultural student
affairs, orientation and new student programs, recreation and intramural sports, religious
programs and veterans’ affairs (2012, pg. 355). This definition also best encapsulates the
vast array of services and departments that all work together on behalf of the student and
may find themselves at the table problem-solving needs together. As we will also see in
our theoretical examination of silos, the actions of each of these departments impact each
other. Therefore, having a term that emphasizes that these services all exist under the
same organizational umbrella of student affairs highlights the influence that silos have on decision-making.

The aim of exploring organizational silos in student affairs is to best understand how the communicative and policy barriers created by these silos can be removed to ensure that student success remains the preeminent concern of colleges and universities. I assume Kuh’s (2010) broad definition of student success as academic achievement, co-curricular engagement, satisfaction, skills and knowledge acquisition, and endurance. What makes Kuh’s definition most attractive for the purpose of this paper is its inclusivity of the multiple facets and aforementioned services impacted by the entire student affairs organizational umbrella.

Student affairs was chosen as the focus of this article for three primary reasons. First, the student affairs arm of colleges and universities provide the wide reaching, underlying support that makes academic participation possible. While the size (student population), type (public or private), or function (trade, research, graduate) may impact the variety of services offered, uniformly, all institutions have a basic student affairs structure in place.

Secondly, there is a gap in peer-reviewed scholarship addressing the prevalence of silos in student affairs, particularly through the lens of organizational theory. Much of the current work that explores silos within higher education addresses silos in curriculum and academic departments, with research seeking to support the need for interdisciplinary learning. While this certainly is vital scholarship that greatly impacts student learning outcomes and career preparation, there lacks a focus on direct student impacts that silos
have in supporting student persistence in light of the financial, social, and emotional needs that occur as part of the college experience.

Third, as the findings after the Virginia Tech Shooting illustrate, silos in higher education is an urgent area that scholars, practitioners, and policy makers alike are demanding higher education practitioners take seriously. An organizational culture that fosters silos has impacts that reverberate and touch not only the institution, but administrative staff, and ultimately students. While the field of organizational theory and scholarship surrounding industrial organizational psychology and management is robust, we must remember Lake (2011), Tierney (1988), and Kuk et al.’s (2010) observation that higher education organizations have failed to develop its own theories and practices of organizational theory. Therefore, substantive research and practical application are needed to begin the process of change within our organizational structures. In Brown’s (2017) conclusion of his study on the departmental silos that have arisen out of the accountability functions of higher education, he too argued that silos will not be understood and processes refined until organizational theory is employed to formulate more efficient and effective systems. Thus, this focus on the impact of silos in student affairs through the lens of organizational theory is both timely and necessary in the fields of higher education and organizational theory.

**Organizational Theory & Silos in HEI Student Affairs**

At its heart, silos are an organizational issue that has relational implications. Much has been written about silos from the organizational perspectives of leaders in business, engineering, and institutional technology. However, because the work of
student affairs is at its core a connective, relational endeavor, it seems most appropriate to examine silos through the lenses of organizational theories that emphasize relational, adaptive, and dynamic environments.

**Contingency Theory**

Often referred to as the science of organizational analysis, contingency theory is characterized by its positivist and objective approach to leadership and administration. Contingency theory assumes that there are generalizable relationships that can be drawn between an organization and its environment. With that comes objective rules that dictate the organization’s structure and behavior (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Empirical data informs decision-making, determines how to invest resources and solves organizational problems solely based upon patterns and observable data. Contingency theory asserts that a solid organization is one that is masterfully in sync to the contingencies of its environment. It is the job of leadership to stay accustomed and responsive to the environment and continually tune the organization to meet its needs and demands.

Contingency theory and the concept of differentiation accounts for the rapid growth in administrators and support staff within colleges and universities and the subsequent evolution of organizational structures (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). As the contingencies within the environment increase and evolve, so does the organizational structure to account for these factors. The notion of differentiation provides explanation for the modern state of organizational structures in higher education. Differentiation describes the process by which the organization becomes more complex in response to the environment becoming more unstable or multifaceted. Within higher education today,
we are experiencing changes in technology, funding and revenue, accountability standards and regulations, and the learning and social needs of learners (Brown, 2017; Castleman et. al., 2015; Levy & Polnariev, 2016). Levy and Polnariev (2016) refer to this differentiation occurring while also facing diminishing funding as “One of the greatest imperatives faced by colleges and universities…” (p. 3). In order to address this new environment, institutions of higher learning look vastly different than they did just decades ago. As more knowledge is needed to understand and solve the problems of the environment, organizations must stratify themselves structurally and hire workers to tackle a larger breadth of experiences and expertise. Castleman et. al. (2015) describe the urgency of this situation by acknowledging that “diminishing financial barriers and improving academic preparation require both systemic change and significant ongoing investment” (p. vii). This accounts for the rapid increase in administration and support staff in colleges and universities and has brought about the rapid growth in third-party vendors to offer additional support.

Colleges and universities have fundamentally changed their structure, policies, and procedures as a result of emerging concerns such as:

- Changing demographics of students
- Recognition of learning differences and accommodations
- Enacting Title IX protections
- Requirements for developmental education
- Increase in pressing social service needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and supplies
- Need for diversity and inclusion
• Increase in English as a Second Language Learners

• Access to financial aid and other assistance in light of drastic tuition increases (Castleman, et al., 2015)

In response to these concerns, higher education institutions have had to adapt their organizational structure and drastically expand their workforce to include support arms such as:

• Establishing additional offices and organizations to support untraditional students, students of different races and ethnicities, immigrants, DACA recipients

• Development of learning labs, adaptive technology support staff, instructional coaches, and ADA compliance and regulatory staff

• Incorporating Title IX investigators and compliance officials for general students and athletic departments

• Adding additional instructional coaches, academic and financial advisors to ensure students are able to meet developmental requirements and still persist towards a degree

• Hiring social support staff such as counselors and starting food, clothing, and supply programs

• Hiring staff to promote diversity and inclusion efforts among the college and to support students of those backgrounds in their academic, social, and leadership development

• Incorporating more language support and advising services and hiring multi-cultural staff to work with ESL students
Increasing financial aid staff and employing coaches who can assist students in navigating the financial aid system, procuring funding, and understanding the ramifications their academic decisions may have on their financial aid funding (Castleman, et al., 2015; Kezar and Holcombe, 2017; Lake, 2011)

Just these few examples illustrate how connected contingencies are to the rapid organizational growth within student affairs in higher education institutions. It also attests to how incredibly multifaceted and interdependent the notion of student support is, which further illustrates the value of complexity theory in our attempts to better understand higher educational organizations and administration.

The process of differentiation also may account for the formation and perpetuation of organizational silos. Marion and Gonzales’ (2014) description of vertical differentiation notes that layers of leadership arise to coordinate the different roles that are established to meet emergent environmental factors. I would propose that these increasingly involved layers insulate the lower levels of production, thereby leading to individualized cultures and organizational silos. Spatial differentiation occurs as organizations develop divisions or departments in different geographic locations to best service the institution. In higher education, we often see this play out in the form of satellite campuses or collaborations with third parties located in far flung corporate locales (Andrews, 2006). This geographical isolation easily facilitates the formation of silos within an organization.
Contingency theory also proves valuable in this discussion of explaining how
silos are formed as it forces recognition that higher education organization and functions
are dictated by a myriad of laws, policies, and procedures. Colleges and university
function and decision-making are dictated by regulations such as the Family Educational
Rights and Privacy Act, federal Title IV funding regulations, Title IX, Americans with
Disabilities Act, accreditation requirements, and health and safety codes (Lake 2011).
Consideration for the aforementioned regulation and institution’s established policies
must be prominent in any attempts to reorient organizational structures and accommodate
more efficient communication to break through silos.

In attempting to solve for these organizational silos in student affairs departments
within higher educational institutions, overcoming spatial and vertical differentiation
must be integral to the solution. We must attempt to ensure free-flowing
interdepartmental collaboration and communication in environments that are increasingly
separate, both geographically and hierarchically. To further complicate this
differentiation, as contingencies change and the organization expands to meet them,
inevitably holistic problem solving will involve more departments and individuals who
all have a stake in the matter. For example, students withdrawing from a class will need
to click more than a button in their student portal; they need to reach out to financial aid
to discuss the potential ramifications on their aid eligibility, the student accounts office to
see if there will be any resulting balance or credit on their account, the academic advisor
to explore how this change may impact their graduation plan or academic standing, their
sorority/fraternity/club advisor to see if the course change may impact their social standing, and then the registrar to ensure that the proper paperwork is processed.

Accounting for these increasing complexities is an inherent weakness in solely applying contingency theory to solving for information silos. In the example above, what may objectively look like a simple process and procedure (withdrawing from a class) actually involves multiple stakeholders. If information is siloed within one of these processes or departments, it may drastically impact the entire process, and most importantly the student’s success. A scientifically objective, prescriptive approach is not enough to account for all of these complexities with degree of flexibility and nuance that the situation deserves. Moreover, considering higher education organization and functions as an expression of inputs and outputs reduces student affairs professionals as cogs who process raw data — admitting students, registering students, getting them through their studies — and negates students as one of many outputs of the system. Using such an impersonal approach denigrates the student affairs professional and the student and casts a very relational process into a very impersonal and mechanical process.

Complexity Theory

The fields of economics, science, management, and education still predominantly operate under the assumptions of a mechanistic worldview. This perspective assumes that all is objective, measurable, predictable, and controllable, and that decision-making and administration functions as a system of inputs, outputs, and the scientific method (Boulton, 2010). People are mere elements of the machine and a step in the system, valued for their exports alone. Complexity theory has developed in acknowledgement
that a mechanistic worldview does not tell the full story of the dynamic nature of life itself. Marion and Gonzales (2014) described complexity theory as a natural evolution of collectivism and constructionism that answers some of the unaddressed questions of ideals such as sensemaking and loose coupling. The emphasis in complexity theory is on networks that exist within a dynamic environment that interact with other dynamic networks. These networks are capable of extraordinary productivity and innovation as long as there is space for collaboration, adaptation, creativity, and learning (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). For our context of organizational silos within student affairs spaces, our networks can be considered each siloed department or work unit within the institution. While separate networks, or departments, will and should exist to complete their specialized tasks within the institution, service and innovation will only flourish is there is collaboration by working across silos.

Boulton’s (2010) more philosophical approach to the development of complexity theory asserted that the theory serves as an antithesis for a mechanistic worldview. Where a mechanistic perspective leaves nothing to chance or subjectivity, complexity theory affirms that the environment is entirely unpredictable, and a system must remain open and fluid to match whatever needs arise. However, Marion and Gonzales’s take on complexity acknowledged that networks are moderately restricted interacted systems. Eisenhardt & Tabrizi (1995) support this and further clarified that complex environments are not entirely devoid of structure. Instead the structure vacillates between order and disorder, change and stability. This agility embraced by complexity theory is notably suitable for the ever evolving and increasingly complex environment of higher education,
and the need for higher education institutions, particularly those departments serving students, to remain responsive to the needs of its environment.

Marion & Gonzalez (2014) describe complexity theory as how existing networks comprised of interdependent individuals adapt and respond to changing environmental factors and realities within the organization. Perhaps the most adequate description of complexity within the context of organizational structures is that of the biological concept of symbiosis, where completely different organisms live together in such close physical proximity that they feed off each other and foster the others’ growth and continued maintenance. To apply the adjective “symbiotic” when framing organizational structures in light of complexity theory implies that departments, while often perceived as overlapping or intertwined, are separate notions with individual functions, but yet they exist so closely together that they strengthen and supply the other with purpose and function within the institution. These distinct networks or departments exist in such close proximity that they nourish each other and become integral to the other’s development and survival. In the case of student affairs silos, although they remain very separate and distinct from each other, to effectively work to serve students within the larger environment of the higher education institution, there must be recognition and strengthening of the symbiotic nature of the relationship between each unit. When each is completing their specialized tasks yet working together in relationship with each other, there is mutual strength and edification to the institution as a whole.

If we accept complexity theory’s basic premises that systems operate best when they are adaptive, value diversity of experience and perspective, and function
connectively, then we must reject organizational silos as a characteristic of healthy organizational function. At its core, organizational silos thrive on an ethos of self-perpetuated insulation. Silos preserve the status quo and value consistency and predictability in its policies and procedures (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). In a higher education organizational setting, approaching student services through the lens of complexity creates departments and services that work together in tandem to meet each student’s unique needs. Complexity allows for adaptability and collaboration that results in relational decision-making processes that benefit both the institution and the student.

Complexity and the aforementioned notion of symbiosis may also be a poignant way of describing the relationship between students and the organizational structure that other theories do not fully capture. While in some models students are reduced to inputs and/or products of a system, in applying complexity theory, students can be considered another “network” at work adapting and responding to their environment in the higher education organizational structure. This may help us further contextualize the role of students in the institution and how we value and regard them as we make organizational decisions.

**Senge’s Concept of the Learning Organization**

Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (2006), a tome to systems thinking, stresses that lifelong learning is vital for a healthy organization. This notion lead to him coining the term *learning organizations*, which are “…organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people
are continually learning to see the whole together” (2006, pg. 3). For Senge, healthy organizations must evaluate problems holistically and be managed as a living, dynamic organism.

In light of the assertion that silos are an organizational problem that must be approached relationally and Senge’s argument that healthy organizations must be lifelong learners who are holistic systems thinkers, it would make sense that this analysis would also include two highly relational learning theories that speak to the formation and perpetuation of silos — Constructivism and Connectivism. Each of these theories both incorporate self-directed learning and stress experience as integral to the learning process. However, each differs on how knowledge is constructed. Constructivism and connectivism both speak to the essence of silos and also provide insight as to how higher education institutions can approach solutions for more efficient and effective cross-silo collaboration.

**Constructivism.**

Constructivism as a learning theory asserts that learning is a socially constructed process where learners piece together knowledge out of their experiences and interactions (Willingham, 2009). As an individual encounters new information, they will seek to make sense of it through the lens of their prior experiences and worldview. If the knowledge is assimilated as Piaget posited, the learner will take the information and incorporate it into already existing framework without changing the framework. If the information is accommodated, the learner takes in the information and reframes their
worldview based upon that information. Knowledge therefore is deemed subjective because it is contingent upon each individual’s prior knowledge base.

Learning for the constructivist is both individualistic and collaborative. While learning is seen as self-directed and involves internal contextualization, it is also experiential in nature. Much emphasis is placed upon collaboration and socialization, where individuals share experiences together and then assimilate or accommodate the new information into their worldview (Bruner, 1996). Diverse perspectives and wide-ranging experiences are seen as enriching and expanding one’s worldview, integral to the learning process. Constructivism places more responsibility on the learner for their own learning, for it requires active engagement and assimilation. Instructors (or administrative leadership and staff for the purpose of this application to silos) are seen as facilitators who direct the flow of discussion and knowledge exchange. Since the act of learning is individualistic, they do not bear direct liability for a learner’s success.

One barrier to applying constructivism within an educational administrative setting is its insistence on the subjectivity of knowledge. In a highly policy-driven field such as higher education and student affairs, there must be objective standards by which accountability can be created. However, the subjectivity of constructivism is helpful when approaching problem-solving because it recognizes that each student’s issue is varied and nuanced and requires fact-finding and information gathering in order to best meet the student’s needs.

Constructivism is quite useful in tackling matters of organizational theory and
management and provides an interesting perspective for exploring organizational silos in student affairs. The insistence on socialization in the learning process can also be applied to the interactions of departments within higher educational institutions. As departments work across lines to transfer information and engage in problem solving, this process of socialization is strengthening each department. Siloed departments can be equated with individuals who do not engage in experiential or social learning. While there is an internal framework in place, it is not growing or being challenged because limited new information being assimilated or accommodated. Healthy organizations must insist on fostering collaborative learning. Tierney (1988) highlighted this when he stated: “Organizational culture exists, then, in part through the actors’ interpretation of historical and symbolic forms. The culture of an organization is grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization.” (pg. 4). In order to provide exceptional service to students and the institution as a whole, we must move towards a constructivist understanding that shared experience is vital to continued learning and growth.

**Connectivism.**

Connectivism argues that knowledge is found within networked connections, and the practice of learning is the ability to construct and navigate those networks. (Downes, 2012). According to Siemens (2005, 2006) and Downes (2012), at its neurological core, learning is a result of our 100 billion brain neurons making connections as a result of experience. Therefore, a straightforward description of learning is the formation of connections on both a micro (neurological) and macro (social networking) level. Like
constructivism, connectivism places responsibility on the self to direct learning (Downes, 2012) and relies on a certain innate skill of individuals to contextualize their experiences and seek out opportunity for sharing information (Goldie, 2016; Siemens, 2005). Also similar is the perception that educators (or administrative leaders and staff for the context of this article) serve as navigators of sorts, assisting individuals in how to make connections between knowledge sources and concepts.

The distinctive of connectivism is its connection to organizational theory. According to Siemens (2005), both organizations and individuals are learning organisms. As attention shifts to how we manage knowledge, there arises a need for a learning theory that delves into the link between individual and organizational learning. Siemens argued that the traditional learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism hold that learning occurs within the individual. While a constructivist approach maintains that learning is a social process, it still places the locus of learning with the individual. Connectivism’s innovation therefore lies in shifting the principality to networks, where we encounter varied experiences and stored information banks via technology. Learning for the connectivist occurs in the moment of connection with these networks.

Connectivism’s insistence of networks in the learning process certainly has implications for the siloed organization. If learning is a process of connection-making through networks and shared experiences, then by nature, a silo is stifling growth and development for the staff within it, the department as a whole, and the students it serves. This again harkens back to Peter Senge’s principle of the learning organization (2006). A connectivist approach to a learning organization would emphatically agree that healthy
organizations require adaptability and a supportive aspiration. For the connectivist, it stands to reason that these goals are best carried out by supporting robust networking and technology application to maximize learning opportunities for the organization’s members.

Within the context of student affairs, silos limit the ability to use networks (other departments) to gain the knowledge necessary to make holistic decisions on issues of organizational processes and individual student success. By insulating themselves, departments are cutting themselves off from knowledge sources and will struggle to provide holistic student support. Instead, student affairs departments should gravitate to the networking model and embrace the potential of knowledge networks for sharing experiences and crowdsourcing information on how to improve performance. These implications for networking can be applied both interdepartmentally within a university through shared office spaces and committees, intentional opportunities for conversation and troubleshooting, events such as Kaizen, and realigning to adopt common missions. Externally, these connections can also be made with other departments and likeminded professionals in the field through conferences, professional organizations, message boards, and social groups.

There must be recognition of some of the limitations of connectivism as a theory in general and specifically as applied to silos in student affairs. Connectivism champions the ideal of access through experiences, networking, and connection making. It also views technology as integral to modern-day learning and connection through networks. I would assert that binding the practice of learning and information gathering to technology
makes learning privileged. In order to fully participate within the learning process from a connectivist framework, one must have unfettered access to technology and the networks it provides. However, access to technology is still very much privileged. From a connectivist framework, how are those with limited access to technology due to socio-economics, learning differences, and physical disabilities fully able to participate in learning? How do our organizations support these individuals? What about the limits of technology and information sharing amongst institutions who do not have integrated data systems or software or who might contract with third party servicers who have limited access to certain data systems and/or information? In applying connectivism’s open networking to a siloed student affairs setting, there must be intentional thought to the policy limitations on information sharing. For example, one must think through FERPA’s limitations on information sharing. If we assume FERPA’s current legitimate educational interest threshold in sharing information, we must be intentional in drawing lines in how direct that educational interest is to those with which we dialogue. These are all considerations to be thought out before applying a strictly connectivist theory to silos.

**Concluding Reflections for Application**

As the tragedy of Virginia Tech attests, silos within higher education institutions are an organizational problem with significant consequences to the safety and success of students, staff, and the institution as a whole (Calhoun & Weston, 2012). While the United States Department of Health and Human Service’s *Report to the President on issues raised by the Virginia Tech tragedy* (2007) emphatically argued that silos, particularly within student affairs, must be evaluated, there were no recommendations as
to what an intervention might look like. Likewise, as staff and administrative leadership in colleges and universities evaluate their institutions, the siloization of the organization is quickly recognized; however, paralysis often sets in as we look towards measures to address them. By evaluating this issue through the lens of organizational theory, we can begin to pull apart at the threads that weave together silos and begin to identify the behaviors and patterns that perpetuate them.

Structural contingency and complexity theory provide solid lenses in exploring organizational leadership and higher education administration. While contingency theory provides scientific insight in how these silos are formed, complexity theory offers a more artistic, relational approach in how to solve for them. In tandem, both of these theories have incredible value in both understanding the issue of silo formation, but also in beginning to look for solutions on how to address information silos within the myriad of departments under the student affairs umbrella. At the heart of complexity is its emphasis on creativity, innovation, and learning to solve for organizational problems. As we work to identify potential next steps of how to break down these silos that impact student success, we must gravitate towards approaches with these elements at its core: relationship, creativity, continual learning, innovation, and equity.

Silos choke off the formation of knowledge and communication that are vital to do the integrative and collaborative work that functioning a student affairs delivery system demands. If higher education institutions ascribe to a constructivist and/or connectivist approach to education and learning within our curriculum and academic delivery, why does our embrace of their importance not carry over into how we approach
our organizational structure and function? If learning is a social and networked activity as these two theories posit, it would also stand that our organizational structures should also exist as social, networked spheres so that departments and their staffs can flourish in their decision-making and holistically serve students and the institution.

Hierarchical relationships between departments and leadership must be rethought to ensure a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach towards policy amongst departments and leaders within student affairs, academic affairs, and on up to cabinet level officials. Vertical intradepartmental and interdepartmental relationships amongst staff members must stress clear, consistent lines of communication. Developing a culture of consistent and clear communication should include the following: 1) cultivation of life-long learners who are adaptable and curious and seek to constantly improve their practice as student affairs professionals, 2) participation in training and professional development to ensure a nuanced understanding of applicable policy and procedure, and 3) intentional opportunities to collaborate and problem solve with peers and leaders both inside and outside one’s departmental silo. Regardless of the method, we must approach problem-solving with a complexity lens, acknowledging the interconnectedness of departments/networks and the impact that change has on them all.
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Article 2 - Solving Silos:
Applying Collaborative Governance to Organizational Silos in Higher Education

Abstract

Silos within higher education organizational structures have formed due to the increasingly complex environment in which institutions operate. These silos, particularly within student support departments, adversely impact the institution, its employees, and its student stakeholders. Action must be taken to address these silos through creative, innovative, and relational solutions that are grounded in equity. This article explores one potential solution from the field of Public Administration – the concept of Collaborative Governance (CG). Discussion of CG in concept and practice demonstrates how it is ripe for application to the problem of higher education’s organizational silos. Based off these observations, the article offers up an original five phase collaborative governance-based framework, called the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework. The framework walks higher education practitioners from conception to implementation in forming their own transformative interdepartmental collaborative governance body that bridges silos. The article also offers up guiding principles and practical considerations for building the legitimacy and sustainability of the resulting collaborative governance body’s work within higher education institutions.
Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the United States have grown in their complexity in response to their ever-evolving role within a dynamic environment. This evolution has resulted in the pervasiveness of silos, which obstruct HEIs from efficiently carrying out their educational missions (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). When discussing the concept of silos within higher education, research and discussion most often sets its sights on addressing silos as an academic concern, addressing the hyper-specialization of knowledge and efforts to provide innovative co-curricular learning opportunities (Keeling et al., 2007). However, there is not enough acknowledgement of the organizational silos embedded within an institution’s hierarchy that significantly hinders communication, decision-making, collaboration, innovation, and the capacity to enact transformation change. The impacts of these organizational silos are not just systemic and detrimental to the institution; they directly impact student experience and retention (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018; Weissman et al., 2009).

Tackling silos within the organizational fabric of the higher educational institution requires a creative, practical solution that is well suited to the environmental factors that press upon the HEI system. Additionally, these efforts must be intentional, structured, and systematic forms of action, as Tinto (2012) observes is necessary for institutions to adopt in order to address student success in a coherent and connected, and therefore successful manner. In this article, I propose that the concept of Collaborative Governance (CG), from the field of public policy, matches Tinto’s aforementioned characteristics and is ripe for application to improving silos within higher education institutions. This article will explore how these organizational silos have formed within higher educational
institutions and dive into collaborative governance frameworks and its suitability to apply to HEI silos. The article will then detail an original framework, the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework, grounded in collaborative governance and higher education research, designed specifically for higher education practitioners with a purpose and four overarching guiding principles that grant the agility for each institution to tailor the process to its unique environment and system. The framework will walk practitioners through a five-phase process from conception to implementation on how to form their own collaborative governance body to begin interdepartmental work and challenge their organizational silos.

**Silos in Action**

First, it is helpful to look at a real-life example of how silos impact both students at staff in routine interdepartmental work at a HEI. Withdrawing from a course is a common behavior practiced by both two- and four- year college students through their educational experience (McKinney et al., 2018), yet it is a routine process that illustrates inefficient exchange of information and lack of collaboration that can exist within these siloed organizational structures in HEIs, particularly in areas that directly support students such as Academic Advising, Financial Aid, and Student Billing. Within a typical HEI, a student may desire to withdraw from a course and incorrectly assume it may be as easy as a button click within a student portal; however, withdraws require assessment on a variety of student support services fronts to advise on potential impacts. Because of the organizational silos pervasive among student support services, instead of having a centralized information source that navigates students through decision-making and the
institutional bureaucracy, students are sent upon an informational scavenger hunt, gathering snippets of information from a variety of departmental sources in hopes that they have the know-how to contextualize and construct the big picture. It is not just students who must seek out information from each department; departments must also rely on clear lines communication and collaboration with each other to ensure that each has the correct details needed for thorough decision-making and advising of a student.

Figure 1 below illustrates the multiple, concurrent lines of communication occurring between student and each department necessary to inform this withdraw decision. The student must reach out separately to the Academic Advising, Financial Aid, and Student Billing departments seeking information about the implications of their potential withdraw. Each of these departments must also exchange specific information with each other that may impact how a department advises the student on the ramifications of the withdraw. For example, Financial Aid may need data about the student’s last date of attendance from Academic Advising in their classes to best counsel about financial aid ramifications to a potential withdraw.
Instead of efficient and complete communication exchanges, what often results is a bureaucratic back and forth between the student and each department. Having multiple stakeholders each with their own vital pieces of information, the risk of miscommunication or misadvising is exacerbated. With so many contingencies and information silos that impede clear, efficient paths of streamlined communication, one can see how students, particularly first-generation college students, underrepresented minorities, and those with emotional or learning differences, may be discouraged in engaging with these systems or persisting in their education. For student support services, silos hinder the exchange of information interdepartmentally, which may encumber efforts to make informed institutional policy decisions or provide holistic student advising or support, as was the case with the tragedy of the Virginia Tech shooting. And certainly, the significance that this type of organizational dysfunction perpetuated by
siloization has on innovation, process improvement, and staff well-being and retention must not be overlooked.

Simply put, as was acknowledged in the days after Virginia Tech, silos are a threat to both student success and institutional well-being and must be addressed (Calhoun & Weston, 2012; United States Department of Health & Human Services, 2007). Furthermore, as Levy and Polnariev (2016) summarize “…regardless of how well-intentioned a particular student success initiative, if it operates in isolation (in a ‘silo’), the likelihood of that program having significant and sustained positive outcomes is greatly reduced, if not eliminated” (pg. 4). Unfortunately, efforts to create cohesion still lack any unifying strategy, as Tinto (2012) notes:

Despite years of effort, institutions have yet to develop a coherent framework to guide their thinking about which actions matter most and how they should be organized and successfully implemented. Too often, institutions invest in a laundry list of actions, one disconnected from another. The rest is an uncoordinated patchwork of actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than it could or should be. (p. 5)

Fortunately, the concept and process of collaborative governance and the new framework presented in this article may provide such a framework in which institutions may finally be able to work cross-departmentally and inform policy transformation.

Organizational Silos in Higher Education Institutions

The concept of silos must be recognized to understand their impacts to HEIs as an organization. The term silo was originated by "organizational participants to describe the
cognitive and emotional quality of their often fragmented and constrained personal (and interpersonal) engagements at work” and to encapsulate perceived organizational boundaries (Diamond et al., 2004; Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). Silos derive from a hierarchical, mechanistic organizational structure characterized by prescribed roles, responsibilities, and a clearly defined chain of command that enforces policy and passes down information (Stone, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). Oftentimes, these silos are a result of innovations in service delivery to meet specific needs that are initially successful, but in time fail to adapt to changes within their system and become obsolete, overconfident, overspecialized, and/or overprotective (Senge, 2006).

Relatedly, as in the case of some higher education departments, silos may also result out of an organizational unit that contains unique processes, practices, and perspectives that insulate it from the rest of the organizational culture because of the necessary and highly specialized nature of its functions (Briody & Erikson, 2016). Siloed organizational units may or may not share a knowledge base, common policies and procedures, or even cultural norms and become microcosms. These microcosms are so highly structured to support their own functions that collaboration and information sharing is consciously or unconsciously considered unnecessary. As Keeling et al. (2007) noted, silos within higher education become more focused on advancing their own goals and objectives rather than supporting the institution’s mission.

Psychological and informational components of silos can be significant hindrances to collaborative interdepartmental work in a siloed environment. The
aforementioned organizational barriers, perceived or otherwise, are often shared and internalized by employees and impact behavior and relationship making (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Diamond et al., 2004; Ashforth et al., 2008). This silo mentality or mindset breeds a sense of competition and fosters a protective nature that restricts relationships, communications, and organizational outcomes across boundaries (Tajfel, 1982; Joshi et al., 2010; McNeil et al., 2013; Salas et al., 2015). The competitive environment and sense of us vs them further fractures efforts to work interdepartmentally and fragments both peer-to-peer relationships and holistic student support efforts (Jacoby & Dean, 2010). Information silos are also a component of the organizational silos found within HEIs that describes information that is not (because of gatekeeping, omission, or policy considerations) or cannot (because of technological access) be widely shared amongst others within their own organizations (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). This information may refer to written, verbal, or digital data and/or decision-making information amongst stakeholders, and may be complex, nuanced matters that involve Institutional Technology, policy, and/or other cultural or collaborative considerations depending on the type of information conveyed and the means of conveyance.

**Environmental Factors in HEI Organizational Silos**

In order to address organizational silos in higher education institutions and identify potential solutions, it is helpful to discuss the environmental factors that have resulted in the formation and perpetuation of these silos. Silos have occurred due to several interdependent factors. One overarching factor is the increased corporatization
and the embrace of its operations frameworks within higher education (Andrews, 2006; Manning, 2013). While different factors have led to this transition over a period of decades within the U.S., HEIs were left with decreased public and private financial support (Andrews, 2006; Levy & Polnariev, 2016). Therefore, HEIs were forced to adapt more corporate approaches to revenue generation, which shifted thinking of students as not only products of a learning system, but customers.

With the shift of student as customer has come with an increase in need to bolster recruitment and retention to capture increased tuition funds. Significant investments have been made in student life, academic, and social support services to meet the needs of the growing populations they are serving and to provide holistic, high quality educational experiences (Manning, 2013). Students are increasingly representative of more diverse social, religious, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds, and are more demanding of diverse campus experiences as part of a comprehensive learning environment (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) point out that these changes in student demographics have impacted the competitive factor in recruiting students but also the need for strategy in building solid student systems to meet diverse students’ needs.

Outsourcing has become a common way for HEIs to extend beyond their scopes and leverage limited resources to develop and/or operate services such as resident life and food services, admissions and large-scale marketing, and even academic support services (Manning, 2013). Along with outsourcing, more corporate approaches to revenue generation have also led to innovations in public-private partnerships and collaborations for funding, therefore increasing the diversity and number of internal and external
stakeholders that the institution is beholden. Related to these evolutions in stakeholder affairs, an additional considerable factor to the siloization of HEIs has been the increased complexity and volume of local, state, federal and stakeholder accountability measures (Garza Mitchell & Maldanado, 2015). Brown (2017) attributes this expansion in accountability and assessment to several factors such as the trend of corporations (and thereby the increasingly corporate higher education sector) being subjected to higher standards and regulation, the need for transparency to justify high tuition costs, and the rise of performance-based allocation of resources that demand measurable outputs and evidence of success.

In order to meet the aforementioned demands related to corporatization, revenue generation and finances, student needs, outsourcing, stakeholder engagement, and accountability and policy enforcement, the organizational structure of HEIs has ballooned in number and complexity (Castleman et al., 2015; Levy & Polnariev, 2016). The resulting organizational hierarchy reflects niche departments that carry out highly specialized tasks, maintain their own internal and external accountability metrics (where sometimes data is often not shared interdepartmentally), and formulate relationships with their specific internal and/or external stakeholder groups (Brown, 2007; Manning, 2013). These organizational units often create their own cultures with their own practices and vernacular, enforce their own policies, and achieve professional development in their own specialty sphere, further fomenting the insular culture across institutions (Brown, 2007). As these environmental factors continue to press against the higher education
organizational system, siloization will only continue unless met with a timely, actionable intervention.

**Collaborative Governance**

Upon considering organization silos within higher education institutions, the environmental factors that have caused them and the problems they create, what intervention might be appropriate to both the organizational phenomena of silos and the environment of higher education systems that they exist within? I propose that collaborative governance (CG), a concept from public administration that details processes and structures designed to engage stakeholders across sectors in decision-making, offers such practical guidance for working across boundaries in complex contexts that translates into transformation in higher education praxis.

As the divide between the public and private sphere continues to become less pronounced within the modern context, collaborative efforts have become a necessity to fully address the issues that arise within communities. Public administration, previously characterized by its vertical hierarchy and top-down bureaucracy, is trending more horizontal in nature because of the ever-increasing complexity of problems and relationships between public and private entities. (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Kettl, 2002; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) attribute the rise of collaborative governance and the need for cross boundary collaboration on interdependent problems that are dynamic and unwieldy, often fraught with incomplete or misinformation. Not only are these “wicked problems” multi-faceted, but the contexts that they exist in are increasingly complex, facing strained resources, political constraints,
and evolving systemic conditions amongst other environmental considerations. These demands call for fresh and innovative approaches to decision-making and governance steeped in cross-sector collaboration, which is where CG has risen to the task (Bryson, et al., 2006; Morse & Stephens, 2012).

Characterized by its vast array of applications within practice and scholarship, there is no universal definition, guidelines, or standard to collaborative governance in which its scholars or practitioners adhere (Amsler, 2016; Batory & Svensson, 2019; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Some scholars hold strict notions as to the applications of collaborative governance, most notably Ansell and Gash (2007) who assert that CG takes place between a public agency and a private entity and is initiated by the governmental actor since the process is for governing purposes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Batory & Svensson, 2019). However, other foundational definitions and the general trend of scholarship in CG is moving towards more open parameters around the stakeholders involved and who drives the processes (Batory & Svensson, 2019) which makes it well suited for solving the problems of silos in HEIs. For this article, I will adopt Emerson and Nabatchi’s well recognized definition of collaborative governance as “the processes and structures of public policy decision-making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (2015, p. 18). Emerson et al., (2012) assert that their more generous definition embraces the multi-disciplinary sources of applied knowledge and concepts embedded within collaborative governance practices (such as conflict management,
organizational theory, public administration, and sociology) and allows it to be applied to a wider variety of settings such as higher education.

Collaborative governance in practice cuts across multiple policy silos and involves diverse stakeholder groups. It is often employed in matters that are deeply multi-faceted with social, political, and economic stakes such as concerns regarding watersheds, forestry management, determining land use and right-of-way issues, and healthcare coverage and public health policymaking. Some of this work can be short-term, one-off mediated problem solving convenings, or they can be more long-term, sustained collaborative bodies, all depending on the wicked problem that they seek to address. One example of CG in action is the Everglades Taskforce, comprised of federal landowners, local government, state and federal environmental agencies, tribal representation, agricultural resources, water specialists, and flood managers, and convened with the goal of coordinating the restoration of the Florida Everglades’ priceless biosphere and sustaining the efforts in perpetuity (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

Collaborative governance is not simply a synonym for mere collaboration; the evocation of governance within the term connotes more than simply working together on a task or policy consideration. Governance asserts intentionality -- structured, principled processes and procedures around actionable decision-making (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, Kettl, 2002, Morse & Stevens, 2012). Ansell and Gash (2007) also note that by using the term collaborative over similar terms of participatory or interactive also emphasizes the deliberative, consensus nature of this approach. In a similar vein, collaborative governance is not merely networking or information/data exchange. While
CG certainly involves navigating relationship-building, stakeholder engagement and education, and power brokering, networking and information exchange is only a part of carrying out the work of collaborative governance. These delineations are important to note as we consider CG’s application to higher education silos; CG is different than simply another committee, collaborative effort, or networking event.

**Collaborative Governance Frameworks**

The work of collaborative governance is highly situational and dependent upon the decisions being made and their environments. Because of the complexity inherent within these environments and the wicked problems that it seeks to address, collaborative governance demands a nuanced approach in order to fully understand it in practice. Fortunately, scholar-practitioners within the field have developed countless frameworks of collaborative governance, outlining approaches, techniques, and processes involved in its application to a wide variety of situations that may live within the selected parameters of the chosen conceptualization of collaborative governance. Some CG frameworks may be more conceptual in nature, looking more broadly into considerations and guiding principles that may drive the decision-making process or guide negotiation between stakeholders. Other frameworks may be very linear and detailed, prescribing each step or phase of consideration to formulating the collaborative governance body, facilitating convenings, or implementing policies and procedures.

To best understand what a CG framework looks like and how it might be helpful in application in higher education, let’s first examine two such frameworks, the National Policy Consensus Center’s (NPCC) Agreement Seeking framework and Emerson &
Nabatchi’s Integrative framework. Then we can further explore a potential collaborative governance framework specifically for silos in HE may look like. These two frameworks specifically have been chosen for further examination as they represent two different but equally valid approaches to CG frameworks that both speak strongly to systems thinking, while providing strong considerations for the development of the cross-silo framework proposed here.

National Policy Consensus Center’s Agreement-seeking framework

The NPCC’s Agreement-seeking framework utilizes a stages and phases approach steeped in organizational theory and the notions of technical rationality to provide insight into the form and function of collaborative governance (Carson, 2007; Mogren and Wright, n.d.). The distinctive of this framework illustrated in Figure 2 below is in its process-based approach with clearly delineated, linear, iterative stages and phases to describe the process and mark the progress of collaborative governance work. The framework also has a touch of a systems theory element, where the legitimacy of the outcomes is predicated on the legitimacy of the processes. There is a high degree of practicality in applying this framework; the phases/stages and corresponding questions of key areas for exploration can serve as a solid introductory primer into the elements of the CG process and as potential accountability measures to gauge progress of the collaborative work in action.

Phase One is Convening, which encompasses the stage of assessment/planning and organization and establishes that in order to reach a collaborative’s successful “conclusion” (as defined by the framework), a CG effort must significantly invest in
setting a solid foundation. This foundation includes the work of vision-casting, mission-making, and organizational structuring. (Carson, 2007; Mogren and Wright, n.d.). A strength of the NPCC framework is that its process approach emphasizes the crucial importance in ensuring that this work is done intentionally and strategically in order to set up the future potential of the collaborative to evolve through implementation. Phase Two hones in on seeking agreement and involves two stages: education and negotiation/resolution. This phase highlights the complexity of engaging in decision-making with varied stakeholders who represent multiple priorities, value systems, and metrics for measuring success. Establishing a shared understanding of a problem(s) amongst all of the group members takes a high degree of education of the stakeholders and those that may be impacted by a CG group’s work. Phase Three’s work of implementation shift education, communication, and relationship-building to external stakeholders. Up to this point, this work has been primarily taking place internally amongst the collaborative’s members. As the collaborative shifts towards ensuring that the decisions they have made come to fruition, work must be done to ensure that the ground is fertile for its policies to be implemented. Areas often under consideration in this phase deal with administrative, financial, and technological structures necessary to lead implementation efforts and ensure the best possible chances of success.

Figure 2

*National Policy Consensus Center’s Agreement-seeking framework*
Integrative framework for Collaborative Governance

Based on open systems theory, the Integrative framework centers around the premise that collaborative government bodies are in continuous interaction with their external environment. As illustrated in Figure 3 below, Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) identifies the following as components of this framework: the system context/external environment in which the collaborative governance “regime” (body or convened group) operates within, drivers or considerations that serve as inputs, collaboration dynamics or processes that propel the work of the regime, and actions/outcomes/adaptation in the form of outputs and feedback loops. A strength of this framework lies in its observation that collaborative governance exists within a dynamic environment. However, the integrative framework’s open systems approach acknowledges that both the essence and the work of collaborative is constantly in flux – collaboratives do not exist in a vacuum. This output or feedback is constantly informing the member on the individual level and
the collaborative as a whole. It also reminds us that all stakeholders involved in collaborative governance regimes are representatives of organizations with their own environments and systems. Acknowledging that these individual systems and unique environments are intrinsically brought into the collaborative government regime demands that stakeholders are continuously, intentionally discerning and sensitive to system feedback. Strategic communication and continual education therefore are also key to ensure that participants are knowledgeable about changes to their environments to ensure that their decision-making adapts accordingly. The Integrative framework’s emphasis on environmental sensitivity and adaptation make it valuable inspiration in creating our own framework for solving for silos within higher education.

Figure 3

*Integrative framework for Collaborative Governance*

*Emerson, et al., 2012*

*Why Apply CG frameworks to the work of Silos in HEIs?*
Collaborative governance is ripe for application in the field of higher education, and specifically to the work of solving the conundrum of organizational silos. Research and practice speak to the various environments where collaborative governance is most impactful in negotiating cross sector decision-making. Most notable are the following six circumstances:

1. Complexity of issues that involve multi-faceted considerations (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Kettl, 2002; Morse & Stephens, 2012; Greenwood et al., 2021)
2. Diversity of stakeholders from both public and private sectors that often blur boundaries (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Kettl, 2002; Morse & Stephens, 2012)
3. Increasingly complex and insular organizational/institutional structures (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson et al, 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015)
4. Scarcity of resources that drives competition and urgency in decision-making and problem-solving (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson et al, 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015)
5. Highly policy-driven environments (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Kettl, 2002; Morse & Stephens, 2012)
6. Emphasis on equity within decision-making for those who are making the decisions and those beholden to them (Bryson et al., 2006; Carlson, 2007; Greenwood et al., 2021)

Each of these six factors that are a fit for collaborative governance are all elements that are identified in our discussion on silos as prevalent within higher education.
organizational silos. Therefore, collaborative governance may prove to be useful when applied to organizational silos within higher education. Each siloed unit serves as an individualized entity that must be engaged across boundaries to carry out a unified institutional purpose that could not be accomplished otherwise through collaborative decision-making and management. What does such an application of collaborative governance to HEI organizational silos look like? A sample framework of the structure and process may assist scholar-practitioners in envisioning this in practice.

**Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance Framework for Organizational Silos in HEIs**

In order to assist higher education practitioners with envisioning and taking actionable steps towards creating a sustainable initiative to address silos, particularly amongst student support structures within higher education institutions, I suggest the use of collaborative governance-based framework I call the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework. The CSCG framework combines features of the NPCC and Integrative frameworks to address issues of silos within HEIs. Like our example CG frameworks, the CSCG framework involves both overarching concepts and processes that are designed to assist interested parties in walking through an intentional process to set up a collaborative body by a) determining what form the collaborative body will take appropriate to their unique needs and b) establishing implementation and functional capacities of that body in order to improve cross-section decision-making.

The CSCG framework will be presented by first exploring the general structure and purpose, which articulates a skeleton of the collaborative body’s overarching duties and responsibilities with the goal to help garner initial interest in joining the endeavor.
Ultimately, the framework’s phased processes are designed to flesh out the full scope and membership of the collaborative body. Next, four guiding principles that shape the entire framework from conception to implementation will be discussed. The framework will then be presented in five phases, with the first three phases focused on planning and the latter two phases on implementation and maintenance tasks.

It is important to note that while the phases are presented as separate and distinct processes with their own descriptions, real world CG is not clear cut, nor is it always linear. (Morse & Stephens, 2012). Particularly, participants may move through this process and its initial phases more iteratively and may straddle multiple phases concurrently since many of these phases involve reflection, calibration, and alignment of resources, participants, values, and structure. As insight is gained in one phase of the process, it may result in reevaluation of work done in earlier phases. One of the strengths of collaborative governance remains in this ability to remain agile and responsive to its environment. Likewise, the designed phased approach of the CSCG framework allows it to be agile to its environment and utilized by HEIs of any type (public, private, community college, 4-year), size, and organizational configuration. By employing a reflective approach rather than prescriptive requirements, those involved are given enough of a proper scaffolding to tailor the collaborative body to their unique needs and environment as we will unpack in our discussion of each phase.

**General Structure and Purpose**

The CSCG framework’s goal is to produce an interdepartmental board comprised of representatives from student support services units representing multiple levels of
leadership and staff who regularly meet to apply the knowledge and skillset of their own departmental domains to commonly shared policy issues that span multiple organizational units. This framework is designed for higher education practitioners who recognize that organizational silos are a reality in their higher educational workplace and desire to transform their siloed reality through the establishment of a cross-silo decision-making endeavor. For example, an assistant director of financial aid, an academic advising team, and a student billing counselor may have connected at a recent conference for higher education practitioners and shared their joint concerns about how their siloed departments are impacting how their respective departments work together and its impact on supporting students. These three professionals may decide to adopt the CSCG framework to act to address their siloed reality. Those like our three professionals that may be interested in starting a body at their institution using this framework would be considered the initial group of interested stakeholders, who will then initiate Phase 1 of the framework. The subsequent phases of the framework are designed to solidify the membership of the body itself and the precise scope of its work according to the specific needs of those involved.

The work of this collaborative body will be primarily governance in nature, focusing on issues pertaining to refinement of policy, informing design and implementation of policy and resource allocation, building collegiality, and conflict resolution and negotiation (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2021). Secondary work of the collaborative involves process improvement, enhanced
communication and marketing endeavors. Some examples of projects that the resulting collaborative body may take up might be:

- evaluating and revising the processes and policy behind processing student withdraws; reviewing policy on information exchange between the student life and academic advising;
- assessing and revising a wrap-around underrepresented minority student support wrap-around student support experience; or
- renegotiating the policies behind drops and extensions for non-payment and student collection outreach.

Outside of the group’s scope is adjudication, discipline, or decision-making on behalf of one department or one-off student issues. This collaborative body will not be its own work unit and will act as an independent committee or workgroup. It is not a substitution for university or faculty governance. The resulting collaborative body will be designed to be a continual endeavor with no fixed term, becoming a fixture within the higher educational organizational system encouraging horizontal alignment within the institutional structure (Greenwood et al., 2021).

**Guiding Principles**

There are four guiding principles that serve as an overarching value system to be integrated throughout each phase of the process:

1. Guiding Principle: Curiosity
2. Guiding Principle: Intentionality
3. Guiding Principle: Equity and Inclusivity

As described below and within the discussion of the phases, these principles are elements identified in the literature as integral to meaningful endeavors to address silos and engage in collaborative governance. The guiding principles of this framework are designed to be sustained and reiterated through the actions of the participants and policies and decisions of the collaborative body.

**Guiding Principle: Curiosity**

The overarching work of the CSCG framework is in exploring the implications of embracing a systems approach to higher education organizational effectiveness and reconciling the policy implications this may have. How does change in one department affect another department? Kuk et al., (2010) highlighted that individuals within student affairs organizations often suffer from spatial and temporal blindness, which impacts their ability to do their jobs effectively and thoroughly. Spatial blindness (myths, beliefs, or prejudices that lead to a false understanding that they understand the whole system) and temporal blindness (lack of history of current events) severely hampers the system’s functional capacity and relationships across the organization (Kuk et al., 2010). Thus, those engaging with the CSCG framework must act out of a spirit of curiosity to discover these unknown knowns about itself and the work of the organization. For in gaining understanding about these cross-system impacts, the potential for transformative collaborative endeavors is unlocked.

**Guiding Principle: Intentionality**
One unifying factor in the topics of organizational silos, student support, and collaborative governance this article has examined is that transformation requires intentionality. Tinto (2012) urged us to consider that any student success efforts must be intentional, structured, and systematic. When discussing how to break through organizational silos through increased horizontal integration, Keeling et al., (2007) deemed that intentionality to engaging in self-reflective processing was central to ensuring transformative institutional environments. In their project report on bridging silos through collaborative efforts within the California State University system STEM programs, Kezar & Holcombe (2017) repeatedly cite intentionality in creating social ties, operationalizing processes, and challenging power dynamics as integral to the success of the initiative. Collaborative Governance too is characterized by a spirit of intentionality. Participants enter into it with intentionality, a willing party in collaborative actions with deliberate norms, processes, and procedures (Emerson et al., 2012; Greenwood et al., 2012). Throughout each phase of the collaborative governance process, intentionality is paramount to ensure that decisions made are strategically and organizationally aligned. As the framework’s phases are further detailed, this intentionality will be further highlighted, particularly within the initial phases.

**Guiding Principle: Equity and Inclusivity**

As Greenwood et al. (2021) noted, collaborative governance efforts are in part birthed out of a rejection of exclusionary representation within decision-making. For work of this kind to be transformative, all members must commit to inclusiveness and equity within each step of the process (McDougall & Banjade, 2015; Tonelli et al., 2018).
Greenwood et al. (2021) also caution that because these processes and systems are representative of institutions and systems steeped in racism and unconscious bias, without intentional examination every step of the way to ensure equity and inclusivity, collaborative governance could merely be yet another exercise of replicating racist structures and practices.

**Guiding Principle: Relationships**

As discussed earlier in this article, silos are an organizational issue that have relational causes and implications. Casciaro et al., (2019) acknowledge that reorganizing entire organizational structures to repair the damage of silos requires significant investments in financial and human resources; instead, a more efficient approach is focusing on relational activities that facilitate boundary crossing. Addressing silos relationally requires tactics that are cognizant of socio-emotional dynamics. A successful collaborative governance arrangement requires mutual trust, understanding, and commitment, and must be tended to with regularity (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Considerations may include areas such as stressing healthy communication, building and leveraging social capital, or navigating conflict resolution and will be further explored as we discuss each phase more thoroughly.

**Phases of the CSCG Framework**

There are five phases within the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework:

Phase 1: Collaborative System Assessment

Phase 2: Coalition Building & Group Construction
Phase 3: Evaluation of Departmental Domains and Communication Mapping

Phase 4: Design and Implementation

Phase 5: Function and Assessment

This phased approach detailed below is inspired by common collaborative governance frameworks, and specifically within the context of this article, the NPCC framework (Carson, 2007; Mogren and Wright, n.d.). Progression of the phases may not be linear and may often overlap as individuals come together to deliberate what it may mean to work together within the context of this body.

**Phase 1: Collaborative System Assessment**

The purpose of this phase is to examine the environmental conditions in which the collaborative will exist. Deemed as integral to the foundation of a collaborative effort by practitioners of collaborative governance, this phase aims to affirm that the collaborative governance body is a proper course of action and gain additional insight into future decision-making for shaping the form and function of the collaborative (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Greenwood, 2021; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Higher education/academia possesses a unique institutional culture with unique cultural archetypes that should be taken into consideration (Bui & Baruch, 2010). For our CSCG framework, our initial group of interested stakeholders embark on this time of exploration to better understand:

- institutional dynamics around working across departmental silos;
- the historical context behind the development of silos and constraints behind previous collaborative efforts;
• institutional examples or incentives for collaborative efforts; and
• further impetus for pursuing this work and clarity of purpose (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2006; Morse & Stephens, 2012).

Areas of assessment can be broken down further into the systems context analysis (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Systems context probes the following conditions in the surrounding campus environment and how they may impact the function of silos organizations and interdepartmental collaboration:

• public service or resource conditions;
• policy and legal frameworks;
• socioeconomic and cultural characteristics;
• network characteristics;
• political dynamics and power relations; and
• history of conflict (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

As individuals are engaging in this assessment work, information may be gained through a variety of means. Participants in this initial assessment may choose to employ methods such as reviewing historical policy documents and fiscal records, holding interviews with management and staff members, or fielding surveys that poll staff, faculty, and/or students about their attitudes, perceptions, or experiences related to the collaborative efforts of student support services. Information gathered in this phase will be integral to further shaping the collaborative as it moves to its subsequent phases and may be revisited for further review and analysis throughout the collaborative process as the governance process evolves.
Phase 2: Coalition Building & Group Construction

A vital part to initiating a collaborative governance effort is establishing legitimacy to the effort. Building legitimacy and soliciting buy-in for a collaborative governance endeavor within a higher educational setting institutional setting is certainly no small task. Efforts to work across silos must recognize the entrenched academic systems in which they live within and acknowledge that collaborative efforts must be intentional to think how processes provide leverage for cultural currency within the greater academia environs of the institution (Catterall et al., 2019). Higher education and academia are individualistic by nature (Bui & Baruch, 2010), which has perpetuated the formation and continuation of both academic and organizational silos (Keeling, 2007). To engage in breaking silos, those doing the work will be pushing up against that nature, which will have consequences. As Catterall et al., (2019) observe, far too often, those that take on this collaborative work and bear these consequences are individuals with marginalized identities or in roles with the least power and cultural capital to lose. As we consider how our CSCG framework approaches coalition building efforts, questions that may help frame our efforts more equitably include:

- What benefits do both the individual and department have to participate in a collaborative process?
- How is value articulated and reinforced within these processes to ensure continued participation?
- Who is carrying the most risk in doing this work? How can the risk be shared and minimized? How can support be articulated and upheld?
Built upon the information gathered through the process thus far, and inspired by Emerson & Nabatchi’s (2015) Integrative framework, our collaborative body should aim to identify the following roles within the collaborative:

- **Champions**: individuals that possess high levels of institutional prestige who can lend their cultural currency to attract support for the endeavor. These individuals may or may not end up being members of the collaborative body but commit to recruiting members to the collaborative and using their social capital to advocate for the collaborative’s legitimacy as a decision-making body as they refine processes and procedures.

- **Sponsors**: department and/or department representatives that contribute resources such as administrative support or facilities to assist in the collaborative body’s work; may be more than one department, may rotate on a timed rotation or be a shared responsibility.

- **Conveners**: a leadership member from each represented organizational unit who will ensure conditions in their department continually remain ripe for collaboration and support the work of the collaborative body. They will assist in choosing the representative participant(s) from their department, which may be themselves and/or other members of their department.

- **Participants**: representatives of their department or specific job function, leading out in decision-making, communication, advising, and planning. Participants will remain in close relationship with the conveners in order to ensure that decisions
being made as part of the collaborative are in alignment with departmental policies and capacities.

The collaborative should aim to appoint no more than two individuals from each represented department/sector to the collaborative body. The body should embrace a shared leadership model in order to foster equity and inclusiveness (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar, 2018). This can be supported by choosing participants that represent various positions within the organization’s hierarchy. Shared leadership can also be modeled by having facilitation of the meeting and other meeting tasks such as note-taking, time-keeping, or special projects, be done on a rotating and/or ad-hoc basis to encourage diverse leadership and voices within the decision-making process.

Regardless of the role, when considering what individuals should be involved in this collaborative body, first consideration should be given to what Casciaro et al., (2019) describe as Cultural Brokers. Cultural Brokers are those who excel in relationships and have experiences spanning multiple sectors, functions, and/or domains across the organization. Casciaro, et al. further elaborate on the relational impact that these individuals provide teams by labeling their organizational functions as either serving as a bridge or an adhesive across silos. A bridge serves as a knowledgeable go-between that can effectively span the work of two silos to bring together an organizational outcome while minimizing direct interaction or impacts to workflow. Adhesives, on the other hand, are consensus builders who seek to form relationships between two entities that are sustained without a need for their assistance in the long term to continue the
collaboration. These individuals lead with their unique skillsets and make valuable assets to leading out in collaborative governance endeavors.

**Phase 3: Evaluation of Departmental Domains and Communication Mapping**

On its face, Phase 3 may bear some resemblance to the first phase’s system assessment; however, they are intentionally separate and distinct. Phase 1’s focus is upon the important work of identifying the contextual dynamics of the environments that silos exist within and that our CSCG framework is being asked to work within. Phase 3’s is more concretely focused on evaluating and identifying the descriptions and parameters of each organizational unit and job function. In Kezar & Holcombe’s (2017) collaborative work across silos within the California State University system’s URM STEM program, they identified an evaluation of each student support service unit’s roles and responsibilities as the “most important part of implementing our program” (p 52).

By evaluating each departmental domain, the initiative could determine natural paths for collaboration and opportunities for refinement of procedure and policy. This work supported trust building for collaboration, aiding departments that historically do not work together or lack appreciation for other departments’ roles and responsibilities (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Much of this lack of trust may be based off a fundamental lack of knowledge of a unit’s basic job functions and the unique constraints that it works under. In addition to evaluating roles and responsibilities, mapping communication and learning channels are also insightful paths to evaluating the status of departmental operations and identifying opportunities for policy reform, future collaboration, and highly socialized, high-value participants to the collaborative governance process.
Questions for consideration at this phase may include:

- What is the organizational structure of this organizational unit? What job roles are present and what are their responsibilities?
- What departments must this department interact with on a regular basis to complete its job functions?
- How is information regarding policy and operations shared and disseminated among employees? How are employees learning about departmental policies? Institutional policies?
- How is information necessary for decision-making shared between departments?
- How are decisions within this organizational unit currently being made? How are decisions between organizational units currently being made?

In light of findings from Phase 3 work, the collaborative body may find it necessary to revisit Phase 1 or 2 for additional work such as reexamining previously unidentified environmental factors or reevaluating the makeup of the collaborative’s make-up to ensure equitable representation of job functions. These findings may also illuminate some of the first projects that the collaborative wishes to tackle.

**Phase 4: Design and Implementation**

Based upon the information gleaned and the players now committed as a result of Phases 1-3, the collaborative body is ready to move into formalizing itself. This phase focuses on constructing the structure of the group and determining some of its foundational values, areas of focus, and roles and responsibilities in an official charter.
document. Additionally, this phase includes intentional planning for needs and considerations around successful implementation and operations of the new collaborative body’s convening such as administrative requirements, facilitation requirements, and meeting logistics.

Greenwood et al. (2021) propose collaboratives embarking in similar phases of design and organization consider centering this work around the question of how might the group be best organized to achieve its desired outcomes. They further suggest five specific domains to address when officially structuring a collaborative body:

- Framing common purpose and values
- Identifying key roles and responsibilities
- Clarifying processes for decision-making and conflict resolution
- Building form to support function
- Creating working agreements (Greenwood et al., 2021)

This phase’s operationalization focus provides significant opportunity to practice alignment with the CSCG framework’s guiding principles of intentionality and inclusiveness and equity. When strategically planning in each of the five domains above, a unique opportunity is being granted to create a new system of sorts in the form of the collaborative body. For example, as the collaborative is considering the interplay between form and function, intentionality considering how the committee is structured, when or where meetings are held, who is leading meetings, or what the ground rules are may make the difference in upholding inequitable power dynamics or creating new equitable means of decision-making by including voices that may have otherwise been
marginalized. Again, we may see as the collaborative body moves through this phase that there may be a need to reevaluate work from earlier stages. However, because of the absolute necessity in setting up the collaborative for a successful implementation, intention, time, and care should be taken liberally (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Additional questions and considerations at this phase may include the following:

- What is the official structure of the collaborative? What departments and roles are represented?
- What is the duration of member service, if any? How are they appointed or elected?
- Who will serve as the facilitator? Is there need for additional leadership roles such as a note-taker or administrator? How often is the term of service?
- How does the collaborative want to further define its collaborative governance scope considering the general purpose of the collaborative body (see General Structure and Purpose section)? What specific policy issues or process may be on its radar?
- What are our ground rules?
- Where can our project charter be stored? Where can information and records pertaining to the collaborative body be stored and shared with accessibly to all?
- What is the structure of meetings? Frequency? Duration? Who is responsible for agendas and meeting logistics such as space and correspondence?

Phase 5: Function and Assessment
The collaborative body’s functions at implementation will ideally follow the structure established within its Phase 4 formalized operationalization. However, as all practitioners of both higher education and CG readily acknowledge, because of the dynamic nature of our “wicked problems”, even our most strategic of plans require recalibration to our environmental realities. Phase 5 acknowledges that this work is naturally apart of the collaborative body’s process and encourages regular assessment to be baked within the CSCG framework.

A prevailing characteristic to collaborative governance is that it allows for more adaptation in a dynamic environment than decision-making across a hierarchical structure. Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) note that adaptation can occur with the collaborative governance body itself, among the participants, and/or with the target of its work. Sustainability then can be viewed as a three-part formula involving how adaptive the collaborative body can remain to its environment, how well it maintains trust and builds social capital with campus administration, and if it can continue to practice quality improvement with its own processes and procedures to engage its participants and produce meaningful results.

The collaborative body may consider building a routine assessment period into their operational framework in Phase 4 to ensure continued sustainability and agility as described above. As with the other phases, the assessment phase may also result in revisiting previous phases for necessary recalibration to fine tune structure and processes. When considering how the CSCG framework can assess for sustainability and adaptation,
the following are some additional questions to assist in general assessment and accountability:

- Is the collaborative achieving its intended purpose of improving silos and working interdepartmentally?
- What have been the collaborative’s greatest wins? Challenges?
- What value has been added to our departments? To students? To the institution?
- Has it extended beyond its necessary scope? Should it extend its scope further?
- What voices or perspectives may be shut out of our processes? What voices are being amplified?

As groups continue to find their footing and remain agile to their environments, they will begin to discover what work may best fit under the governance of the collaborative. For example, over the course of several meetings, our newly formed collaborative may decide to take up our student withdraw issue cited in the beginning of our article. The collaborative may invite students or staff members to come speak about their experiences trying to withdraw from courses. Representatives from academic advising, financial aid, and student billing selected to serve on the collaborative body may decide to ask their respective departments for their current policies on how their counsel students on withdraws and how they engage with other departments through verbal or written information. They may then come to the collaborative and report out this information and then collectively discuss other university policies or limitations that may have bearing on the processes and procedures behind student withdraws. The collaborative body then could draft policy recommendations for revising their collective internal process for
student withdraws, along with articulating shared goals and processes for their individual department. The recommendations can then be brought to the conveners of each department for further implementation, and the collaborative can determine their next project of choice.

**Considerations and Conclusion**

Organizational silos between student support functions are a great barrier to the success of students, the well-being of staff, and the health of higher education institutions (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). However, silos are within the control of campus leaders who are willing to engage in creative and collaborative solutions across silos (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Applying this Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework to organizational silos has great potential to facilitate the interdepartmental efforts that are needed ensure best organizational practice and student experiences.

Certainly, implementing a collaborative framework will not be without its issues, as introducing any endeavor of this magnitude in higher education. Along with the earlier discussion of building cultural capital and establishing legitimacy, change management and socialization of stakeholders will be needed to pave the way for fully understanding the impacts of silos and introducing this framework. There’s also importance in acknowledging the exhaustion faced by staff by existing responsibilities and obligations. Care must be taken to market this framework to staff as something that will be low barrier, minimal responsibility, high opportunity for cultural capital, and significant opportunity to directly influence and improve policy and processes that impacts their
daily roles and responsibilities. Financial incentives greatly surpass social or moral incentives in soliciting staff participation on the collaborative (Weissman, 2009).

It is also vital to remember that each higher educational institution is a different system with its own internal and external environmental conditions. The form and the function of this framework will be contingent upon multitudes of factors related to their organizational structure and silos, institutional size, student and staff needs, and intended purposes of the collaborative just to name a few. Therein lies the value of applying collaborative governance to silos; regardless of this variation, our adapted framework can be applied and calibrated to suit the demands of the variety of institutions under the ever-evolving umbrella of higher education. Through the five phase CSCG framework, campus leaders may finally have their intentional, structured, and actionable tool necessary to address organizational silos.
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Weissman, E.L., Cerna, O.S., Geckeler, C., Schneider, E., Price, D.V., & Smith, T.J.
Organizational silos within higher educational institutions (HEIs) have arisen out of the increasingly complex and compartmentalized environments in which they exist. At their core, silos are inequitable, characterized by preserving and perpetuating exclusivity and reinforcing control for the privileged. This article, the third of a 3-part multi-paper dissertation, will explore silos as a problem of inequity by first examining the formation of organizational silos and their impact on students through the lens of critical theory. The article will further evaluate the potential of using collaborative governance (CG), from the field of Public Administration, and the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework, a new framework using CG principles and designed for use by higher education practitioners for addressing the inequity of silos within a higher education environment. Analysis will focus on how CG and the CSCG framework practically address equity and inclusion concerns in its attempts to bridge silos within HEIs. By illuminating the inequity of organizational silos within higher educational institutions and highlighting actionable tools such as the CSCG framework, this article will show that transformative and sustainable strategic planning endeavors must consider institutional organizational structures and service delivery as inseparable from diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing many opportunities to repair and revitalize their broken systems in light of the pandemic and social and political transformations within the United States. Two areas that beg for deeper institutional focus are organizational silos and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Close examination may prove that these two areas are actually intertwined. For example, a large division of a public higher education institution recently completed a 6-month internal review of their internal culture and processes in order to inform strategic planning and possible restructuring endeavors. The review involved a series of voluntary interviews and anonymous surveys with leadership and staff of all levels regarding their thoughts on subjects ranging from mission and core values, communications, trust in leadership, resources, support, and equity and racism in the workplace. The process culminated in a 4-hour virtual retreat intended to present the review’s findings and offer up structured feedback opportunities designed to inform the new strategic plan’s core elements. Results indicated an incredibly siloed division, where departments were incredibly separate from each other and riddled with fractured communication, an us-versus-them mentality, and a lack of trust.

Throughout the meeting, there was palpable tension that went mostly unspoken as these results were reviewed. The interim division lead offered up a personal observation that a divisional strength was equity and inclusiveness, which he illustrated by citing that the internal review and virtual retreat was open for the entire department’s participation. The tension broke as a minority female employee, well respected by her peers in her customer service support role within the division, challenged the division lead by
contradicting his observation that equity and inclusiveness was a strength, and specifically one embodied through this process. She noted that representation and participation by those in lower level support roles were sorely lacking.

The employee did not attribute this non-participation, and therefore lack of input into the division’s strategic plan, to a lack of care from the lower-level employees. Instead, she placed the blame directly on the silos and their damaging impacts to their organization. Their organizational silos had caused several communication breakdowns about the survey and meeting logistics, which resulted in several work units not receiving invitations. Silos between the more privileged, high earning licensed professionals and the lower earning support function employees were evident as leadership were careful to schedule the virtual retreat only around the licensed professionals’ schedules. Leadership chose to hold the retreat virtually requiring home internet on a weekday evening outside of work hours, without offering childcare, dinner, or extra pay, thereby significantly limiting the ability for support staff, statistically made up of working parents below the median household income, to be able to participate. Most poignantly, the employee noted that the interim division lead’s own siloed existence within the leadership sphere made him insulated to recognizing the actual inequities present within this process.

Organizational silos within higher educational institutions (HEIs) such as the ones described above have arisen out of the increasingly complex and compartmentalized environments in which they exist. However, at their core, silos are inequitable, characterized by preserving and perpetuating exclusivity and reinforcing control for the privileged. This article will explore silos as a problem of inequity by first examining the
formation of organizational silos and then exploring their impact on staff and students through the lens of critical theory. For our context, we will view Critical Theory broadly as the exploration of the tension between self and society and explaining the relationships to power that exist within these relationships (Hegel, 1977; Freire, 2014). Within Critical Theory, the organization is seen as a social construct made real within society (Berger & Pullberg, 1967; Peca, 2000). By exploring these relationships, systems, and power structures, individuals can hopefully be less constrained by power (Freire, 2014; Kellner, 2003). This article will embrace Paulo Freire’s (2014) call to praxis as reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed. By looking at the nature of silos within higher educational institutions (HEI), we can begin to question how our siloed organizational systems are constructed and therefore how they can be challenged to bring about better access and equity to those students and staff that are harmed by them.

The article will further evaluate the potential of using collaborative governance (CG), from the field of Public Administration, and the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework, a new framework using CG principles and designed for use by higher education practitioners for addressing the inequity of silos within a higher education environment. Analysis will focus on how CG and the CSCG framework practically address equity and inclusion concerns in its attempts to bridge silos within HEIs. By illuminating the inequity of organizational silos within higher educational institutions and highlighting actionable tools such as the CSCG framework, this article will show that transformative and sustainable strategic planning endeavors must consider
institutional organizational structures and service delivery as inseparable from diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

How do silos perpetuate inequity in HEIs?

In order to begin our critical analysis of how organizational silos perpetuate inequity within higher education institutions, we must first begin by establishing our understanding of silos. Silos perpetuate inequity because they are inherently exclusive and seek to entrench the predominant power structure by creating isolation and competition that preserves the status quo and discourages diversity and collaboration. Next, we can examine the impacts that silos have had on higher education institutions. Analysis will show that organizational silos within HEIs have significantly hampered student support efforts of marginalized and underrepresented student groups and have undermined decision-making, agency, and well-being of staff members.

Interpreting Silos through a Critical Lens

First utilized metaphorically in management literature by Neebe (1987), the term silos originated from "organizational participants to describe the cognitive and emotional quality of their often fragmented and constrained personal (and interpersonal) engagements at work” and in order to encapsulate perceived organizational boundaries and oppression (Diamond et al., 2004; Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). The image of the silo itself is a powerful metaphor for the vertical, insular, exclusive nature of the organizational phenomenon. The purpose of the farm silo is to keep one type of grain separate from another type of grain, stored with a designated purpose, and preserved and unsullied from contamination from the outside environment. The metaphor of silos
extends to how one part of an organization becomes its own silo or mini organization unto itself – segregated, tightly controlled, and united by its homogeneity. (de Waal et al., 2019; Govindarajan, 2011; Hughell, 2021).

Silos by nature are exclusive because they are created out through the overspecialization and overprotection of their own functions and mission (Senge, 2006). As in the case of some higher education departments, silos may also result out of an organizational unit that contains unique processes, practices, and perspectives that insulate it from the rest of the organizational culture because of the necessary and highly specialized nature of its functions (Briody & Erikson, 2016). Siloed organizational units may or may not share a knowledge base, common policies and procedures, or cultural norms and become microcosms, focused upon their own internal missions rather than supporting the institution’s mission (Keeling, et al., 2007). These microcosms become mini organizations unto themselves, so highly structured to support their own functions that collaboration and information sharing is consciously or unconsciously considered unnecessary. What may have started as a unit of organization centered around something such as a practical functional grouping becomes insulated and stymied into their own culture complete with its separate hierarchy, mission, jargon, and values (Brown, 2007; Manning, 2013). A silos’ unique culture and mission may not be in direct competition with the institution; however, they are an exclusive representative of a limited few instead of inclusive of larger institution as a whole. The silos’ exclusivity is perpetuated through leadership decisions and intentional actions to protect its culture, often through the creation of an us versus them mentality (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012; Jacoby & Dean,
Silos in essence become a protective barrier for the unit, demarking both a safe space and identity that is precarious and anxiety inducing to venture away from for meetings, collaborative opportunities, internal hiring and promotion, interdepartmental communication, etc. (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012; Diamond et al., 2004; Stone, 2004). What often results is a tribal loyalty that rejects diversity of belief or personhood as an act of self-preservation. This homogeneity means that only the privileged in-group of the silo is trusted and represented within policies, communication, and leadership. Efforts to increase equity and silo breaking are intrinsically linked as Hughell (2021) notes and as will be discussed later in this article; the best committee, framework, initiative, or layer of administration cannot compensate for an organizational unit that lacks trust or looks, acts, or thinks alike.

Silos also often include a psychological and/or informational component, which can be significant hinderance to collaborative interdepartmental work, particularly within higher educational environments. The organizational barriers of silos, perceived or otherwise, are often shared and internalized by employees and impact behavior and relationship making (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Diamond et al., 2004; Ashforth et al., 2008). This silo mentality or mindset breeds a sense of competition and fosters a protective nature that restricts relationships, communications, and organizational outcomes across boundaries (Tajfel, 1982; Joshi et al., 2010; Salas et al., 2015; McNeil et al., 2013). The competitive environment and sense of us versus them further fractures efforts to works interdepartmentally and fragments both peer-to-peer relationships and holistic student support efforts (Jacoby & Dean, 2010).
In their groundbreaking study, Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012) captured not only the impacts of a silo mentality to a team’s identity, but also noted a compounding impact this had to black women within siloed organizations. Through their interviews with 25 individuals working on a project for a client who was another department within their organization, Cilliers and Greyvenstein (2012) identified that silos served as an invisible barrier creating a sense of otherness towards the client, prevented connection across the silo, and facilitated distrustful, negative and politically charged experiences with the interdepartmental colleagues. What was an unexpected finding was a “silo within a silo” of 7 young black women, who because of their race and age were othered into a silo of their own. The study noted that they felt the impacts of silos more poignantly, particularly rejection and detachment in interdepartmental relations, intergroup conflict fraught with emotion and exhaustion, and the pressure of departmental politics. “It was as if they became the representation of the obliterated, burnt-out ashes of the system…” and “…represent the hopelessness in the fight” (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). These findings certainly inform the urgency in pushing for addressing silos as matters of equity and inclusion.

Andre de Waal et al., (2019) observed that typical underlying drivers of silo development of organizational silos stem from issues of hierarchy, power, control, and, competition. Silos are formed from departmental units with a hierarchical, mechanistic organizational structure characterized by prescribed roles, responsibilities, and a clearly defined chain of command that enforces policy and passes down information (Stone, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2003; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Cilliers & Greyvenstein,
Organizations where silos are prevalent are usually loosely coupled systems, where decision-making is more politicized, localized, and individualized from a formalized central institutional authority (Kezar, 2014). This entrenched hierarchy, politics, and power struggle perpetuate and reinforce silos, and often stifle efforts to innovate and collaborate (de Waal et al., 2019; Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Hughell, 2021; Kezar, 2014; Lencioni, 2006). Silos are deeply hierarchical and political, and often staff are even further marginalized in through layers of vertical differentiation that arise to coordinate various roles that are established to meet emergent environmental factors as siloed units grow (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). These factors further insulate silos and blinds those inside to the environmental realities of the larger organizational institution in which they exist. The status quo can rarely be challenged, and legacy structures and policies, sometimes steeped in systemic racism, may be upheld (de Waal et al., 2019; Hughell, 2021). Consistency and predictability in structures, policies, and procedures remain of upmost importance for leaders, assuring that silos remain standing strong (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009).

Without collaboration or intentional efforts to challenge the in/out group dynamic, the silo’s inclusivity will be perpetuated. Managerially, the practical value of silos relies in its predictability and homogeneity (de Waal et al., 2019; Stone, 2004) through insularity. When people and processes can lessen the potential for variability, power can remain consolidated and control can be maintained (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009). From a corporate mindset, this is seen as efficient and optimal, particularly in light of a complex environment, such as in a higher education structure (Kezar, 2014). However, from the
lens of Critical Theory, and in from the perspective of seeing education as a larger social good, this thinking is dismally deficient. Staying in silos may make things more efficient in the short term; however, it is short-sighted management that is bad for business and filled with missed opportunities for growth (Tett, 2016). We will explore more of the impacts of silos in our next section as we explore the direct ramifications silos and cross-silo collaborative efforts have in higher education.

**Impacts of Silos in Higher Education Institutions**

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the United States have grown in their complexity in response to their ever-evolving role within a dynamic environment. This evolution has resulted in the pervasiveness of silos, which obstruct HEIs from efficiently carrying out their educational missions (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). When discussing the concept of silos within higher education, research and discussion most often sets its sights on addressing silos as an academic concern, addressing the hyper-specialization of knowledge and efforts to provide innovative co-curricular learning opportunities (Keeling et al., 2007). However, there is not enough acknowledgement of the organizational silos embedded within an institution’s hierarchy that significantly hinders communication, decision-making, collaboration, innovation, and the capacity to enact transformation change. The impacts of these organizational silos are not just systemic and detrimental to the institution; they directly impact student experience and retention (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018; Weissman et al., 2009). Moreover, as this section will illustrate, these silos often exacerbate impacts on marginalized students already facing systemic inequities. Intertwined with the impacts to marginalized students, this section will also examine how
efforts amongst higher education staff to work to address silos often fall on those also oppressed by the siloed system itself.

Silos have occurred due to several interdependent factors. One overarching factor is the increased corporatization and the embrace of its operations frameworks within higher education (Andrews, 2006; Manning, 2013). While different factors have led to this transition over a period of decades within the U.S., HEIs were left with decreased public and private financial support (Andrews, 2006; Levy & Polnarev, 2016). Therefore, HEIs were forced to adapt more corporate approaches to revenue generation, which shifted thinking of students as both products of a learning system and customers.

With the shift of student as customer has come with an increase in need to bolster recruitment and retention to capture increased tuition funds. Significant investments have been made in student life, academic, and social support services to meet the needs of the growing populations they are serving and to provide holistic, high quality educational experiences (Lake, 2011; Manning, 2013). Students are increasingly representative of more diverse social, religious, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds, and are more in need of diverse campus experiences as part of an equitable learning environment (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) point out that these changes in student demographics have impacted the competitive factor in recruiting students but also the need for strategy in building solid student systems to meet diverse students’ needs. In order to meet the aforementioned demands related to corporatization, revenue generation, and student needs, the organizational structure of HEIs has ballooned in vastness and complexity (Castleman et al., 2015; Levy & Polnarev, 2016). The resulting
organizational hierarchy reflects niche departments that carry out highly specialized
tasks, creating their individualized cultures with their own missions and practices, and
establishing relationships or initiatives with their own stakeholders such as target student
demographics or academic units (Brown, 2007; Manning, 2013).

The increase in student volume, diversity and complexity has helped further
foment siloization; it is underrepresented minority (URM), low-income, first generation
students that are most harmed by silos within HEIs, particularly as they navigate student
support structures. Conversely, this student demographic greatly benefits from efforts to
bridge silos. Research from California State University’s Science, Technology,
Engineering, and Math (STEM) Collaboratives, a three-year grant-funded project
designed to improve performance and retention through targeted support of URMs in
STEM disciplines, showed that essential information and support tools were inaccessible
due to the siloed organizational structure of the institution’s departments (Kezar &
low-income, and URM students in STEM are locked into separate silos—academic
affairs and student affairs—that are almost never combined, leading to interventions that
almost always meet only part of the students’ needs” (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018, p. 49).
This research echoes Tinto’s (2012) notion that students are not served as well as they
could or should be through siloed initiatives and that they will only be best supported
when support structures are integrated in intentional, coherent and connected ways.

What makes these silos impact URM students more deeply than a multi-
generational, white, middle-class college student and ultimately an issue of equity? I
would propose that these organizational silos are another way that the hidden curriculum is manifesting itself and reinforcing inequity in higher education. Much has been said about the notion of Phillip Jackson’s term (1968) “hidden curriculum” that persists within education. “Hidden curriculum is a set of implicit rules pertaining to the norms, values, and expectations that unofficially govern how people interact and evaluate one another” (Smith, 2013, p 31). The concept of the hidden curriculum further reinforces that education is inherently social, and that through navigating its systems and social structures, underlying values, norms, and behaviors are learned and affirmed. Margolis (2001) noted that Critical Theory begs us to acknowledge how the hidden curriculum and specifically HEIs are reinforcing gender, race, and social class distinctions that ultimately reinforce inequity. These silos, and the hidden curriculum at large, significantly undermine equity and inclusion and harm student success.

The pervasiveness of organizational silos adds further to the hidden curriculum by creating more layers of complexity to the systems in which they are forced to navigate and further fracture lines of communication and information vital to student success. For students that do not possess the knowledge of the social system by benefit of their privilege (e.g., wealth, multi-generational college families, English fluency, access to power), they are left to their own devices to figure out how to “do college” – what is the organizational structure of their HEI; how, when, and what resources are available to them; what assistance is appropriate to even ask for; what their expectations should even be from their student support, campus life, or career preparation experiences – not to even mention any of the more frontline learning or academic expectations one associates with
postsecondary education. The issue is more than a lack of information or access to resources; it is not even knowing what questions to ask or what possibilities are even available. More resources do not necessarily enhance the student experience in navigating these systems as it becomes more complex to navigate, and in a siloed environment, there is often a duplication of resources that may cause extra confusion or distrust in systems or information sources.

Student are left to distill together all of these information sources and make meaning for themselves, akin to the act of putting together a puzzle, but with infinitely higher stakes. Except, in the case of this puzzle, as it is with the hidden curriculum, students do not even know puzzle’s shape, design, or piece count. Through this process of information gathering and construction, we see vast consequences for marginalized student populations. Those “in the know” have a significant advantage navigating the bureaucracy and its specialized language and finding allies to assist them on their journey. Castleman et al. (2015) acknowledged that navigating this complex information and corresponding bureaucratic complexity often creates cognitive overload that results into procrastination, choosing the path of least resistance, channeling factors (easy and obvious path), and simplifying strategies such as deferring to what is immediately accessible. For international students, first generation students, English as a Second Language speakers, and those with learning differences, navigating these siloed systems and constructing information to make crucial decisions about their education becomes a significant barrier to persistence.
Research shows that concentrated efforts to bridge siloed student support structures in service to URMs is effective in improving performance and retention efforts. Most notably is the legacy study of the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), which provided targeted, cross-silo support for students that included staff from financial aid, advising, counseling, residence life, and career services through the duration of their entire undergraduate college tenure. Cross-silo, collaborative student supports are directly attributed to the program’s high degree of success (Maton et al., 2009). The CSU STEM Collaboratives project was similarly patterned in the Meyerhoff legacy. If these small-scale cross-silo programs have been successful, why are they not replicated more frequently on an institutional scale? Kezar and Holcombe argued that the lack of frameworks or incentives for administration and staff to tackle such deeply entrenched silos prevents larger scale implementation (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). If incentives and frameworks are lacking, what approaches may be helpful in helping staff tackle challenging the oppressive organizational silos within their higher education institutions?

**Addressing Organizational Silos While Centering Equity**

Critical theorists such as Apple and Giroux warn us that attempts to challenge oppressive social structures such as silos may often result in reinforcing and reproducing existing power dynamics (Margolis, 2001). This warning serves us well in making sure that any efforts taken to address silos must be done with intention to ensure that the same inequitable structures and harms are not replicated in new endeavors, often even more insidious under the branding of innovation or inclusion. How might we then approach
solving for silos with a focus on equity? This section will discuss the potential of collaborative governance and the Cross-Silo Collaborative Framework for practitioners engaging in actionable, equity centered work within higher educational institutions.

**Collaborative Governance**

Collaborative governance (CG) is a concept from the field of Public Administration that details processes and structures designed to engage stakeholders across sectors in decision-making. As the divide between the public and private sphere continues to become less pronounced within the modern context, collaborative governance has arisen from a need to address multi-faceted, interdependent problems, that are occurring in an increasingly complex and ever-evolving world (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Kettl, 2002; Morse & Stephens, 2012). CG offers up “the processes and structures of public policy decision-making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, p. 18). Practically, CG cuts across multiple policy silos and involves diverse stakeholder groups, often employed in decision-making matters that are deeply multi-faceted with social, political, and economic stakes. Examples of situations where CG may apply include concerns regarding the determination of land use and right-of-way issues, healthcare coverage decisions and public health policymaking.

As we consider potential solutions for the silos in higher education within HEIs, solutions grounded in CG are a valuable starting point for anyone invested in centering equity as they challenge these structures. Collaborative governance efforts are in part
birthed out of a rejection of exclusionary representation within decision-making and an emphasis on the interconnectedness of our problems and our humanity. The process of collaborative governance is driven by the goal to find consensus amongst diverse stakeholders. CG frameworks emphasize the inherently sociological nature of decision-making. Not only will the organization and its decision-makers be shaped by power, interests, and missions; each decision-maker is also an individual that brings to the table their own values, identity, and culture that cannot be divorced from the process (Mogren, 2014). Instead, this local knowledge is seen as an asset to the decision-making process by challenging power structures. Furthermore, strategically including marginalized decision-makers, as many CG endeavors intentionally choose in their convenings, can further assist in democratizing systems and busting through silos.

For collaborative decision-making across silos to be transformative, all members must commit to inclusiveness and equity within each step of the process (McDougall & Banjade, 2015; Tonelli et al., 2018). Ansell and Gash (2018) noted that the legitimacy of the CG process is steeped in this commitment to stakeholders’ perception of equity and fairness. Greenwood et al. (2021) also cautioned that because these processes and systems are representative of institutions and systems steeped in racism and unconscious bias, without intentional examination every step of the way to ensure equity and inclusivity, collaborative governance could merely be yet another exercise of replicating racist structures and practices.

The Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance Framework
Based off collaborative governance principles, the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework for organizational silos in higher educational institutions was designed to assist practitioners with envisioning and taking actionable steps towards creating a sustainable initiative to challenge organizational silos and the inequities they cause within their institutions, particularly within student support services (Mizuta, 2022). The CSCG framework’s end goal is to produce an interdepartmental board comprised of representatives from student support services units representing multiple levels of leadership and staff who regularly meet to apply the knowledge and skillset of their own departmental domains to commonly shared policy issues that span multiple organizational units. This framework involves both overarching concepts and processes that are designed to assist interested parties in walking through an intentional initiative to a) help further determine what form the collaborative body will take appropriate to their unique needs and b) establish implementation and functional capacities of that body in order to foster cross-silo, equitable decision-making.

The framework includes four guiding principles that serve as an overarching value system to be integrated throughout each phase of the process: curiosity, intentionality, equity and inclusivity, and relationship-building. These principles are integral to meaningful endeavors to address silos and engage in collaborative governance. There are five phases within the CSCG framework, summarized briefly below. A full outline of the CSCG framework can be found in Appendix A of this article. Progression of the phases may not be linear and may often overlap as practitioners come together to deliberate what it may mean to work together within the context of this body.
**Phase 1: Collaborative System Assessment**

Phase 1 examines the environmental conditions in which the collaborative will exist. Deemed as integral to the foundation of a collaborative effort by practitioners of collaborative governance, this phase aims to affirm that the collaborative governance body is a proper course of action and gain additional insight into future decision-making for shaping the form and function of the collaborative (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Greenwood, 2021; Morse & Stephens, 2012). This is achieved through a thorough systems context analysis that probes institutional dynamics, historical context, and institutional examples and incentives. The systems analysis of this phase particularly focuses upon probing the environments surrounding the campus environment related to power and political dynamics, socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, history of conflicts, and areas of oppression, systemic racism, and marginalization (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

**Phase 2: Coalition Building & Group Construction**

Phase 2 focuses on the vital work of establishing legitimacy to the cross-silo collaborative governance effort and identifying the participants and roles they will play within the collaborative body being constructed. At this stage of the process, consideration is given to the current nature of power dynamics at play within the siloed environment and who stands to gain or lose through the efforts to establish this new cross-silo decision-making body. Through this phase, participants in the collaborative body work to identify the champions, sponsors, conveners, and participants in this new
endeavor, with emphasis on a shared leadership model that elevates marginalized and unrepresented voices and levels political and power structures across silos.

**Phase 3: Evaluation of Departmental Domains and Communication Mapping**

Phase 3’s purpose is evaluating and identifying the descriptions and parameters of each organizational unit and job function. By evaluating each departmental domain, the initiative can determine natural paths for collaboration and opportunities for refinement of procedure and policy. This work supports trust building for collaboration, aiding departments that historically do not work together or lack appreciation for other departments’ roles and responsibilities (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

**Phase 4: Design and Implementation**

Phase 4 focuses on constructing the structure of the group and determining some of its foundational values, areas of focus, and roles and responsibilities in an official charter document. Additionally, this phase includes intentional planning for needs and considerations around successful implementation and operations of the collaborative body’s convening such as administrative requirements, facilitation requirements, and meeting logistics.

**Phase 5: Function and Assessment**

Phase 5 accounts for continued function of the cross-silo collaborative body and for reflection adaptation of the collaborative governance body itself, among the participants, and/or with the target of its work. This may take the form of a formalized assessment process through a survey or using determined metrics, or may involve having members work through some of the phases again to allow for reevaluation of alignment.
of values, membership, and core form and function. This phase’s goal is to perpetuate long term sustainability of the collaborative and continued grounding in equitable decision-making practices.

How the CSCG Framework Centers Equity in Addressing Organizational Silos

The Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework approaches organizational silos within higher educational institutions as a systemic issue causing inequitable student experiences for students. This framework argues that an actionable way to center equity and address these silos is to form a collaborative body that focuses on working across silos to bring student support services staff and administration together in an ad-hoc body to engage in decision-making and policy improvement in areas of shared concern for the involved departments. The framework’s intentional process that heavily focuses on planning, strategy, and implementation is calibrated to ensure that equity remains central in constructing the collaborative body.

There are a few other notable distinctives in the CSCG framework that directly speak to its ability to center equity in addressing organizational silos. Building legitimacy and soliciting buy-in for a collaborative governance endeavor within a higher educational setting institutional setting is certainly no small task, and it is one in which the CSCG framework takes great reflection and intentionality in addressing. Efforts to work across silos must recognize the entrenched academic systems in which they live within and acknowledge that collaborative efforts must be intentional to think how processes provide leverage for cultural currency within the greater academia environs of the institution (Catterall et al., 2019). The collaborative system assessment in Phase 1 is also integral in
critically assessing the socio-political landscape and the dynamics of the system to determine how to strategically leverage power and where work is needed to address marginalization. Higher education and academia are individualistic by nature (Bui & Baruch, 2010), which has perpetuated the formation and continuation of both academic and organizational silos (Keeling, 2007). To engage in breaking silos, those doing the work will be pushing up against that nature, which will have consequences. As Catterall et al., (2019) observe, far too often, those that take on this collaborative work and bear these consequences are individuals with marginalized identities or in staff support roles with the least power and cultural capital to lose. This is part of what Kezar and Holcombe (2017 & 2018) also touch on in their mention of lack of incentive for staff to tackle silos within their institutions as one of the greatest hindrances to implementation of transformative cross-silo collaborative efforts.

In the CSCG framework, great intentionality is also given to specifically center equity in the process for selecting who will be involved in decision-making. The resulting collaborative body will ensure equal standing and representation of marginalized voices. Phase 2 of the framework suggests that those involved in approaching coalition building for the cross-silo collaborative body address concerns such as who is carrying the most risk in doing this work, how can the risk be shared and minimized, and how can support be articulated and upheld. The shared leadership model used to determine roles and responsibilities is reflected in choosing participants that represent various positions within the organization’s hierarchy and by rotating collaborative facilitation and tasks being taken on a rotating or ad-hoc basis (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar, 2014). Adopting
a shared leadership model for these functions further emphasizes that unbound from their silos and their prescribed hierarchies, participants have equal standing within the collaborative and in its decision-making. The opportunity to participate in a collaborative comprised of multiple departments and levels of staff and administration also allows for skills development, leadership development, networking, cultural engagement, and trust building for individuals that may not have had the same opportunities within their standard roles and responsibilities of their siloed department (Parnell et al, 2018).

Collectively, the CSCG framework can create collaborative bodies that result in departments that now have capacity for conducting shared decision-making for the betterment of student support. The framework’s operationalization focus in latter phases provides significant opportunity to practice alignment with intentionality and equity. For example, as the collaborative is considering the interplay between form and function, intentionality considering how the committee is structured, when or where meetings are held, who is leading meetings, or what the ground rules are, may make the difference in upholding inequitable power dynamics or creating new equitable means of decision-making by including voices that may have otherwise been marginalized in traditional siloed departmental structures.

Conclusion

Organizational silos within higher educational institutions (HEIs) have arisen out of the increasingly complex and compartmentalized environments in which they exist. At their core, silos are inequitable, characterized by preserving and perpetuating exclusivity and reinforcing control for the privileged. Organizational silos between student support
functions are a great barrier to the success of students, the well-being of staff, and the health of higher education institutions (Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). However, silos are within the control of campus leaders who are willing to engage in creative and collaborative solutions across silos (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Applying this Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework to organizational silos has great potential to be the actionable, equity centered framework practitioners have been seeking to help facilitate cross-silo endeavors in their own institutions.

The decision on what type of issues that the new collaborative governance body would like to tackle may have significant effects on policies and systems and should be approached strategically. Regardless, the new avenues for cross-silo collaboration created by this endeavor will allow staff and administration to begin the work of building trust, healing the us versus them tribal rifts, and finding common values interdepartmentally. These opportunities have shown to improve and create new channels of communication both functionally and relationally (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). Staff and administration participants will now have stronger contacts in which to network and connect for information to more efficiently do their jobs, and opportunities to identify places of overlap for streamlining of efforts and initiate new endeavors based on connections made from participating in cross-silo collaborative efforts (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Kezar & Holcombe, 2018). Most importantly, through actionable resources such as the CSCG framework, silos can be challenged and crossed in order to better serve students and remove more of the requirements of the oppressive hidden curriculum that must be traversed in higher education institutions.
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Conclusion

As we have seen through the course of this multi-paper dissertation, organizational silos within higher education, particularly among student support services, have a negative impact on students and staff. In the absence of no explicit higher education organizational theory, we first set our attention in Article 1 to exploring the causes of silos through the lens of such pre-existing theories as structural contingency and complexity theory, along with Senge’s concept of the Learning Organization, and the related ideas of constructivist and connectivist approaches to functioning within higher education institutions (HEIs). Through Article 1’s analysis, we identified elements from these lens that should be present within any solutions to addressing silos: relationship, creativity, continual learning, innovation, and equity.

We saw these elements interwoven throughout Article 2’s shift to exploring actionable solutions to addressing organizational silos within higher education institutions. Within this article, we further explored some of the specific environmental factors that have resulted in the formation and perpetuation of these silos in HEIs. In learning more about the environmental factors that brought us to this precipice, we were able to more clearly evaluate potential actionable approaches that would suit our environmental factors and encourage cross-silo decision-making. Collaborative governance (CG), a concept from the field of public administration rose us as a fitting option that addressed our silo situation, as it speaks to: 1) the complexity of issues that involve multi-faceted considerations; 2) a diversity of stakeholders that often blur boundaries; 3) increasingly complex and insular organizational structures; 4) scarcity of
resources that drives competition and urgency in decision-making; 5) high policy-driven environments; and 6) the emphasis on equity within decision-making for those making decisions and those beholden to them. Inspired from the principles and practices of CG, Article 2 detailed a proposed original framework entitled the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance (CSCG) framework. This framework, comprised of a five-phase process with four overarching guiding principles, is designed for higher education practitioners, staff and administration alike, to guide them through the development of an interdepartmental decision-making collaborative body. Through the CSCG framework, campus leaders finally have an intentional, structured, and actionable tool necessary to address organizational silos.

Article 3 invited us to consider organizational silos within higher education institutions through the lens of Critical theory. Upon examination, we observed that silos are inequitable, characterized by preserving and perpetuating exclusivity and reinforcing control for the privileged. This study allowed us to question how our siloed organizational systems are constructed and therefore how they can be challenged to bring about better access and equity to those students and staff that are harmed by them. Furthermore, Article 3 documented how these silos with HEIs are impacting students and staff as part of the “hidden curriculum” of navigating college life, with marginalized and minority populations bearing significant impacts. The article further evaluated the potential of using CG and the new Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework proposed in Article 2, through the lens of critical theory. Analysis demonstrated how CG and the CSCG framework practically address equity and inclusion concerns in its
attempts to bridge silos within HEIs. By illuminating the inequity of organizational silos within higher educational institutions and highlighting actionable tools such as the CSCG framework, we see that applying this CSCG framework to organizational silos has great potential to be the actionable, equity centered framework practitioners have been seeking to help facilitate cross-silo endeavors in their own colleges and universities.

As we consider next steps for addressing organizational silos within higher educational institutions, we must consider our new realities of our pandemic and, hopefully soon enough, post-COVID world. On a social level, COVID-19 has laid bare our interdependency on one another as we navigate and negotiate the realities of a public health emergency related to a highly communicable virus. Through COVID, we also have experienced new dependencies between institutions and public policy in the form of public health measures and guidelines. Ultimately, we all have gained insight into how inextricably our systems and practices are tied together, and how our survival is intertwined with others. (Cohen et al., 2021)

In spite of this increase awareness of interdependency, organizational silos have been exacerbated by the pandemic. A 2021 workplace study by Zuzul et al., analyzed 360 billion emails from over 4,000 organizations globally and discovered that in spite of increased communications and electronic technology accessibility, silos became more deeply entrenched due to the decreased stability and workforce brought about by COVID. In these times of increased uncertainty, organizations found that individuals became more tribal, clinging to the trust, predictability, efficiency, and insularity found within silos (Tett, 2016).
In higher education, students, staff, and faculty have all been left reeling in a state of constant pivot to adapt to the technical, logistical, emotional, and academic impacts to providing learning, support, and co-curricular opportunities in an ever-changing environment. This has resulted in increased complexity to student needs, financial crises that have ramped up preexisting competitions for resources and funding, and new considerations around remote and hybrid service delivery, to name just a few exigencies that HEIs are facing today. All the while, our academics are continuing their acceleration towards a highly specialized, task-centric models and away from liberal arts and collaborative approaches (Tett, 2016). These factors have led to more fracturing, more transitions and consolidations of tasks and departments, and more organizational silos.

However, as we have also learned in our pandemic existence, this time of uncertainty and transition is also a time of great opportunity for transformation. As we are being forced to face change head on at a dizzying pace, we have been given an opportunity to rethink and recalibrate our priorities and institutions. Our systems and structures have been pushed to its limits; now is the time to capitalize on the moment to reconstruct our institutions in meaningful ways that address the complexity of our wicked problems. The urgency to address organizational silos has never been stronger; we must recognize that silos are part of the broken systems that have been ineffective in serving our institutions, staff, and students effectively and equitably. Now is the time to push for transformative and sustainable change through integrating a collaborative framework of cross-silo decision-making.
References


Appendix: The Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance Framework

The Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework was originally developed by Mandi Mizuta in an article entitled Solving silos: Applying collaborative governance to organizational silos in higher education (Mizuta, 2022). Below is description of the framework. For additional context and application, please refer to the article for a thorough examination of the framework’s development.

General Structure and Purpose

The CSCG framework’s goal is to produce an interdepartmental board comprised of representatives from student support services units representing multiple levels of leadership and staff who regularly meet to apply the knowledge and skillset of their own departmental domains to commonly shared policy issues that span multiple organizational units. This framework is designed for higher education practitioners who recognize that organizational silos are a reality in their higher educational workplace and desire to transform their siloed reality through the establishment of a cross-silo decision-making endeavor. For example, an assistant director of financial aid, an academic advising team, and a student billing counselor may have connected at a recent conference for higher education practitioners and shared their joint concerns about how their siloed departments are impacting how their respective departments work together and its impact on supporting students. These three professionals may decide to adopt the CSCG framework to act to address their siloed reality. Those like our three professionals that may be interested in starting a body at their institution using this framework would be considered the initial group of interested stakeholders, who will then initiate Phase 1 of
the framework. The subsequent phases of the framework are designed to solidify the membership of the body itself and the precise scope of its work according to the specific needs of those involved.

The work of this collaborative body will be primarily governance in nature, focusing on issues pertaining to refinement of policy, informing design and implementation of policy and resource allocation, building collegiality, and conflict resolution and negotiation (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Greenwood et al., 2021). Secondary work of the collaborative involves process improvement, enhanced communication and marketing endeavors. Some examples of projects that the resulting collaborative body may take up might be:

- evaluating and revising the processes and policy behind processing student withdraws; reviewing policy on information exchange between the student life and academic advising;
- assessing and revising a wrap-around underrepresented minority student support wrap-around student support experience; or
- renegotiating the policies behind drops and extensions for non-payment and student collection outreach.

Outside of the group’s scope is adjudication, discipline, or decision-making on behalf of one department or one-off student issues. This collaborative body will not be its own work unit and will act as an independent committee or workgroup. It is not a substitution for university or faculty governance. The resulting collaborative body will be designed to be a continual endeavor with no fixed term, becoming a fixture within the higher
educational organizational system encouraging horizontal alignment within the institutional structure (Greenwood et al., 2021).

**Guiding Principles**

There are four guiding principles that serve as an overarching value system to be integrated throughout each phase of the process:

5. Guiding Principle: Curiosity


7. Guiding Principle: Equity and Inclusivity

8. Guiding Principle: Relationships

As described below and within the discussion of the phases, these principles are elements identified in the literature as integral to meaningful endeavors to address silos and engage in collaborative governance. The guiding principles of this framework are designed to be sustained and reiterated through the actions of the participants and policies and decisions of the collaborative body.

**Guiding Principle: Curiosity**

The overarching work of the CSCG framework is in exploring the implications of embracing a systems approach to higher education organizational effectiveness and reconciling the policy implications this may have. How does change in one department affect another department? Kuk et al., (2010) highlighted that individuals within student affairs organizations often suffer from spatial and temporal blindness, which impacts their ability to do their jobs effectively and thoroughly. Spatial blindness (myths, beliefs, or prejudices that lead to a false understanding that they understand the whole system)
and temporal blindness (lack of history of current events) severely hampers the system’s functional capacity and relationships across the organization (Kuk et al., 2010). Thus, those engaging with the CSCG framework must act out of a spirit of curiosity to discover these unknown knowns about itself and the work of the organization. For in gaining understanding about these cross-system impacts, the potential for transformative collaborative endeavors is unlocked.

**Guiding Principle: Intentionality**

One unifying factor in the topics of organizational silos, student support, and collaborative governance this article has examined is that transformation requires intentionality. Tinto (2012) urged us to consider that any student success efforts must be intentional, structured, and systematic. When discussing how to break through organizational silos through increased horizontal integration, Keeling et al., (2007) deemed that intentionality to engaging in self-reflective processing was central to ensuring transformative institutional environments. In their project report on bridging silos through collaborative efforts within the California State University system STEM programs, Kezar & Holcombe (2017) repeatedly cite intentionality in creating social ties, operationalizing processes, and challenging power dynamics as integral to the success of the initiative. Collaborative Governance too is characterized by a spirit of intentionality. Participants enter into it with intentionality, a willing party in collaborative actions with deliberate norms, processes, and procedures (Emerson et al., 2012; Greenwood et al., 2012). Throughout each phase of the collaborative governance process, intentionality is paramount to ensure that decisions made are strategically and organizationally aligned.
As the framework’s phases are further detailed, this intentionality will be further highlighted, particularly within the initial phases.

**Guiding Principle: Equity and Inclusivity**

As Greenwood et al. (2021) noted, collaborative governance efforts are in part birthed out of a rejection of exclusionary representation within decision-making. For work of this kind to be transformative, all members must commit to inclusiveness and equity within each step of the process (McDougall & Banjade, 2015; Tonelli et al., 2018). Greenwood et al. (2021) also caution that because these processes and systems are representative of institutions and systems steeped in racism and unconscious bias, without intentional examination every step of the way to ensure equity and inclusivity, collaborative governance could merely be yet another exercise of replicating racist structures and practices.

**Guiding Principle: Relationships**

Silos are an organizational issue that have relational causes and implications. Casciaro et al., (2019) acknowledge that reorganizing entire organizational structures to repair the damage of silos requires significant investments in financial and human resources; instead, a more efficient approach is focusing on relational activities that facilitate boundary crossing. Addressing silos relationally requires tactics that are cognizant of socio-emotional dynamics. A successful collaborative governance arrangement requires mutual trust, understanding, and commitment, and must be tended to with regularity (Bryson et al., 2006; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Considerations may include areas such as stressing healthy communication,
building and leveraging social capital, or navigating conflict resolution and will be further explored as we discuss each phase more thoroughly.

**Phases of the CSCG Framework**

There are five phases within the Cross-Silo Collaborative Governance framework:

- Phase 1: Collaborative System Assessment
- Phase 2: Coalition Building & Group Construction
- Phase 3: Evaluation of Departmental Domains and Communication Mapping
- Phase 4: Design and Implementation
- Phase 5: Function and Assessment

This phased approach detailed below is inspired by common collaborative governance frameworks, and specifically within the context of this article, the NPCC framework (Carson, 2007; Mogren and Wright, n.d.). Progression of the phases may not be linear and may often overlap as individuals come together to deliberate what it may mean to work together within the context of this body.

**Phase 1: Collaborative System Assessment**

The purpose of this phase is to examine the environmental conditions in which the collaborative will exist. Deemed as integral to the foundation of a collaborative effort by practitioners of collaborative governance, this phase aims to affirm that the collaborative governance body is a proper course of action and gain additional insight into future decision-making for shaping the form and function of the collaborative (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Greenwood, 2021; Morse & Stephens, 2012). Higher education/academia possesses a unique institutional culture with unique cultural archetypes that
should be taken into consideration (Bui & Baruch, 2010). For our CSCG framework, our initial group of interested stakeholders embark on this time of exploration to better understand:

- institutional dynamics around working across departmental silos;
- the historical context behind the development of silos and constraints behind previous collaborative efforts;
- institutional examples or incentives for collaborative efforts; and
- further impetus for pursuing this work and clarity of purpose (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2006; Morse & Stephens, 2012).

Areas of assessment can be broken down further into the systems context analysis (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Systems context probes the following conditions in the surrounding campus environment and how they may impact the function of silos organizations and interdepartmental collaboration:

- public service or resource conditions;
- policy and legal frameworks;
- socioeconomic and cultural characteristics;
- network characteristics;
- political dynamics and power relations; and
- history of conflict (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

As individuals are engaging in this assessment work, information may be gained through a variety of means. Participants in this initial assessment may choose to employ methods such as reviewing historical policy documents and fiscal records, holding interviews with
management and staff members, or fielding surveys that poll staff, faculty, and/or students about their attitudes, perceptions, or experiences related to the collaborative efforts of student support services. Information gathered in this phase will be integral to further shaping the collaborative as it moves to its subsequent phases and may be revisited for further review and analysis throughout the collaborative process as the governance process evolves.

**Phase 2: Coalition Building & Group Construction**

A vital part to initiating a collaborative governance effort is establishing legitimacy to the effort. Building legitimacy and soliciting buy-in for a collaborative governance endeavor within a higher educational setting institutional setting is certainly no small task. Efforts to work across silos must recognize the entrenched academic systems in which they live within and acknowledge that collaborative efforts must be intentional to think how processes provide leverage for cultural currency within the greater academia environs of the institution (Catterall et al., 2019). Higher education and academia are individualistic by nature (Bui & Baruch, 2010), which has perpetuated the formation and continuation of both academic and organizational silos (Keeling, 2007). To engage in breaking silos, those doing the work will be pushing up against that nature, which will have consequences. As Catterall et al., (2019) observe, far too often, those that take on this collaborative work and bear these consequences are individuals with marginalized identities or in roles with the least power and cultural capital to lose. As we consider how our CSCG framework approaches coalition building efforts, questions that may help frame our efforts more equitably include:
• What benefits do both the individual and department have to participate in a collaborative process?

• How is value articulated and reinforced within these processes to ensure continued participation?

• Who is carrying the most risk in doing this work? How can the risk be shared and minimized? How can support be articulated and upheld?

Built upon the information gathered through the process thus far, and inspired by Emerson & Nabatchi’s (2015) Integrative framework, our collaborative body should aim to identify the following roles within the collaborative:

• Champions: individuals that possess high levels of institutional prestige who can lend their cultural currency to attract support for the endeavor. These individuals may or may not end up being members of the collaborative body but commit to recruiting members to the collaborative and using their social capital to advocate for the collaborative’s legitimacy as a decision-making body as they refine processes and procedures.

• Sponsors: department and/or department representatives that contribute resources such as administrative support or facilities to assist in the collaborative body’s work; may be more than one department, may rotate on a timed rotation or be a shared responsibility

• Conveners: a leadership member from each represented organizational unit who will ensure conditions in their department continually remain ripe for collaboration and support the work of the collaborative body. They will assist in
choosing the representative participant(s) from their department, which may be themselves and/or other members of their department.

- **Participants**: representatives of their department or specific job function, leading out in decision-making, communication, advising, and planning. Participants will remain in close relationship with the conveners in order to ensure that decisions being made as part of the collaborative are in alignment with departmental policies and capacities.

The collaborative should aim to appoint no more than two individuals from each represented department/sector to the collaborative body. The body should embrace a shared leadership model in order to foster equity and inclusiveness (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar, 2018). This can be supported by choosing participants that represent various positions within the organization’s hierarchy. Shared leadership can also be modeled by having facilitation of the meeting and other meeting tasks such as note-taking, time-keeping, or special projects, be done on a rotating and/or ad-hoc basis to encourage diverse leadership and voices within the decision-making process.

Regardless of the role, when considering what individuals should be involved in this collaborative body, first consideration should be given to what Casciaro et al., (2019) describe as Cultural Brokers. Cultural Brokers are those who excel in relationships and have experiences spanning multiple sectors, functions, and/or domains across the organization. Casciaro, et al. further elaborate on the relational impact that these individuals provide teams by labeling their organizational functions as either serving as a bridge or an adhesive across silos. A bridge serves as a knowledgeable go-between that
can effectively span the work of two silos to bring together an organizational outcome while minimizing direct interaction or impacts to workflow. Adhesives, on the other hand, are consensus builders who seek to form relationships between two entities that are sustained without a need for their assistance in the long term to continue the collaboration. These individuals lead with their unique skillsets and make valuable assets to leading out in collaborative governance endeavors.

**Phase 3: Evaluation of Departmental Domains and Communication Mapping**

On its face, Phase 3 may bear some resemblance to the first phase’s system assessment; however, they are intentionally separate and distinct. Phase 1’s focus is upon the important work of identifying the contextual dynamics of the environments that silos exist within and that our CSCG framework is being ask to work within. Phase 3’s is more concretely focused on evaluating and identifying the descriptions and parameters of each organizational unit and job function. In Kezar & Holcombe’s (2017) collaborative work across silos within the California State University system’s URM STEM program, they identified an evaluation of each student support service unit’s roles and responsibilities as the “most important part of implementing our program” (p 52).

By evaluating each departmental domain, the initiative could determine natural paths for collaboration and opportunities for refinement of procedure and policy. This work supported trust building for collaboration, aiding departments that historically do not work together or lack appreciation for other departments’ roles and responsibilities (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Much of this lack of trust may be based off a fundamental lack of knowledge of a unit’s basic job functions and the unique constraints that it works
under. In addition to evaluating roles and responsibilities, mapping communication and learning channels are also insightful paths to evaluating the status of departmental operations and identifying opportunities for policy reform, future collaboration, and highly socialized, high-value participants to the collaborative governance process.

Questions for consideration at this phase may include:

- What is the organizational structure of this organizational unit? What job roles are present and what are their responsibilities?
- What departments must this department interact with on a regular basis to complete its job functions?
- How is information regarding policy and operations shared and disseminated among employees? How are employees learning about departmental policies? Institutional policies?
- How is information necessary for decision-making shared between departments?
- How are decisions within this organizational unit currently being made? How are decisions between organizational units currently being made?

In light of findings from Phase 3 work, the collaborative body may find it necessary to revisit Phase 1 or 2 for additional work such as reexamining previously unidentified environmental factors or reevaluating the makeup of the collaborative’s make-up to ensure equitable representation of job functions. These findings may also illuminate some of the first projects that the collaborative wishes to tackle.

**Phase 4: Design and Implementation**
Based upon the information gleaned and the players now committed as a result of Phases 1-3, the collaborative body is ready to move into formalizing itself. This phase focuses on constructing the structure of the group and determining some of its foundational values, areas of focus, and roles and responsibilities in an official charter document. Additionally, this phase includes intentional planning for needs and considerations around successful implementation and operations of the new collaborative body’s convening such as administrative requirements, facilitation requirements, and meeting logistics.

Greenwood et al. (2021) propose collaboratives embarking in similar phases of design and organization consider centering this work around the question of how might the group be best organized to achieve its desired outcomes. They further suggest five specific domains to address when officially structuring a collaborative body:

- Framing common purpose and values
- Identifying key roles and responsibilities
- Clarifying processes for decision-making and conflict resolution
- Building form to support function
- Creating working agreements (Greenwood et al., 2021)

This phase’s operationalization focus provides significant opportunity to practice alignment with the CSCG framework’s guiding principles of intentionality and inclusiveness and equity. When strategically planning in each of the five domains above, a unique opportunity is being granted to create a new system of sorts in the form of the collaborative body. For example, as the collaborative is considering the interplay between
form and function, intentionality considering how the committee is structured, when or where meetings are held, who is leading meetings, or what the ground rules are may make the difference in upholding inequitable power dynamics or creating new equitable means of decision-making by including voices that may have otherwise been marginalized. Again, we may see as the collaborative body moves through this phase that there may be a need to reevaluate work from earlier stages. However, because of the absolute necessity in setting up the collaborative for a successful implementation, intention, time, and care should be taken liberally (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Additional questions and considerations at this phase may include the following:

- What is the official structure of the collaborative? What departments and roles are represented?
- What is the duration of member service, if any? How are they appointed or elected?
- Who will serve as the facilitator? Is there need for additional leadership roles such as a note-taker or administrator? How often is the term of service?
- How does the collaborative want to further define its collaborative governance scope considering the general purpose of the collaborative body (see General Structure and Purpose section)? What specific policy issues or process may be on its radar?
- What are our ground rules?
- Where can our project charter be stored? Where can information and records pertaining to the collaborative body be stored and shared with accessibly to all?
What is the structure of meetings? Frequency? Duration? Who is responsible for agendas and meeting logistics such as space and correspondence?

**Phase 5: Function and Assessment**

The collaborative body’s functions at implementation will ideally follow the structure established within its Phase 4 formalized operationalization. However, as all practitioners of both higher education and CG readily acknowledge, because of the dynamic nature of our “wicked problems”, even our most strategic of plans require recalibration to our environmental realities. Phase 5 acknowledges that this work is naturally apart of the collaborative body’s process and encourages regular assessment to be baked within the CSCG framework.

A prevailing characteristic to collaborative governance is that it allows for more adaptation in a dynamic environment than decision-making across a hierarchical structure. Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) note that adaptation can occur with the collaborative governance body itself, among the participants, and/or with the target of its work. Sustainability then can be viewed as a three-part formula involving how adaptive the collaborative body can remain to its environment, how well it maintains trust and builds social capital with campus administration, and if it can continue to practice quality improvement with its own processes and procedures to engage its participants and produce meaningful results.

The collaborative body may consider building a routine assessment period into their operational framework in Phase 4 to ensure continued sustainability and agility as described above. As with the other phases, the assessment phase may also result in
revisiting previous phases for necessary recalibration to fine tune structure and processes. When considering how the CSCG framework can assess for sustainability and adaptation, the following are some additional questions to assist in general assessment and accountability:

- Is the collaborative achieving its intended purpose of improving silos and working interdepartmentally?
- What have been the collaborative’s greatest wins? Challenges?
- What value has been added to our departments? To students? To the institution?
- Has it extended beyond its necessary scope? Should it extend its scope further?
- What voices or perspectives may be shut out of our processes? What voices are being amplified?

As groups continue to find their footing and remain agile to their environments, they will begin to discover what work may best fit under the governance of the collaborative. For example, over the course of several meetings, our newly formed collaborative may decide to take up our student withdraw issue cited in the beginning of our article. The collaborative may invite students or staff members to come speak about their experiences trying to withdraw from courses. Representatives from academic advising, financial aid, and student billing selected to serve on the collaborative body may decide to ask their respective departments for their current policies on how their counsel students on withdraws and how they engage with other departments through verbal or written information. They may then come to the collaborative and report out this information and then collectively discuss other university policies or limitations that
may have bearing on the processes and procedures behind student withdraws. The collaborative body then could draft policy recommendations for revising their collective internal process for student withdraws, along with articulating shared goals and processes for their individual department. The recommendations can then be brought to the conveners of each department for further implementation, and the collaborative can determine their next project of choice.