RESEARCH ARTICLE

The challenges of student affairs at Kenyan public universities

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Abstract

Kenya is increasingly turning to the promise of mass higher education to help solve a range of economic and social issues. These efforts have had profound effects on university students, faculty and professionals who provide the vital student support services necessary for academic success. This case study explores the challenges that face Kenyan student services professionals within the context of the country's history and cultures. Kenya's student service professionals face four major challenges: the increasing costs of attendance, the resulting impact on student behaviours and actions, lack of training and senior leadership, and regular campus closures.
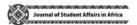
Keywords

student affairs, accommodation, student housing, student services, university environment, higher education.

The challenges of student affairs at Kenyan public universities

Kenya is increasingly turning to the promise of mass higher education, meaning a shift from an elite to an open system of access, to help solve a range of economic and social problems (Jowi, 2009; *Kenya Vision 2030*, 2007). The national government has made its commitment to post-secondary education evident through the addition of over 25 public universities and constituent colleges since 1994 and its adoption of policies encouraging rapid enrolment growth in nearly all post-secondary institutions. Between 2010 and 2013, Kenya made nearly 20 constituent colleges and branch campuses into stand-alone universities. Even with this growing capacity, Kenya's demand for access to affordable higher education far exceeds the system's ability to deliver quality instruction and student support (Ngolovoi, 2010; Owuor, 2012). While the Kenyan government has implemented numerous reforms intended to increase educational efficiency and degree production, far fewer resources have been provided for services to support enrolled students. This is problematic because

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admitting students to university without providing appropriate levels of support often results in a failed academic experience and wasted institutional resources.

Just as nations turn to higher education to solve societal problems, universities often look to the increasingly professionalised field of student affairs or student services to address issues of behaviour, housing, retention, health and career selection. Outside the US, many professionals performing student services work come from backgrounds without a formal curriculum in student affairs, such as faculty members, psychological counsellors or clergy. The field of student services or student affairs varies substantially around the world with the US model focusing on recruitment, retention, graduation and student learning outcomes, and with other models focusing more on services, such as financial aid, housing, food services, and counselling (Ludeman & Gregory, 2013).

This case study explores the challenges that face Kenyan student services professionals within the context of the country's history and cultures. Kenya's student service professionals face four major challenges: the increasing costs of attendance, the resulting impact on student behaviours and actions, lack of training and senior leadership, and campus closures.

Kenyan higher education and student affairs background

At the time of political independence in 1963, Kenya's Royal Technical College, with an enrolment of fewer than 600 students, was its single public institution of higher education. Kenya's economy was largely agricultural and the British colonial government had little interest in educating the indigenous population (Chege, 2009). The Royal College, which would become the University College of Nairobi and later the University of Nairobi (U of N) in 1970, was a source of national pride. It was charged with the critical task of educating Kenyans to fill the administrative vacuum created when English managers left their posts (Oanda, Chege & Wesonga, 2008; Wangenge-Ouma, 2008) and 'Africanising' government institutions (Willis & Gona, 2013). Once established as Kenya's first university, the institution quickly became the epicentre for political activity and government intervention (Chege, 2009).

Kenyatta College (later renamed Kenyatta University) was established in 1972 on the outskirts of Nairobi as a U of N constituent college charged with educating the nation's future teachers. Kenyatta University (KU) was granted university status in 1985 in a decade when Kenya established three additional universities: Moi (1984), Egerton (1987), and Jomo Kenyatta University of Science and Technology (1994). Maseno University (2000) and Masinde Muliro University (2007) were added more recently. Table 1 lists all public universities including the ones that have recently been changed from constituency colleges or branch campuses, the date of their original founding, and the year in which they were given university status.

Table 1: Kenyan universities

University name	Area	Originally a constituent campus of	University status
University of Nairobi	Nairobi	n/a	1970
Moi University	Eldoret	n/a	1984
Kenyatta University	Nairobi	n/a	1985
Egerton University	Njoro	n/a	1988
Maseno University	Maseno	n/a	1991
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	Nairobi	n/a	1994
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology	Kakamega	Moi University	2009
Murang'a University College	Murang'a Town	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2011
Machakos University College	Machakos Town	Kenyatta University	2011
The Co-operative University College of Kenya	Nairobi	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2011
Embu University College (UoN)	Embu Town	University of Nairobi	2011
Kirinyaga University College (KU)	Kirinyaga County	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2011
Rongo University College (MU)	Rongo Town	Moi University	2011
Kibabii University College (MMUST)	Bungoma	Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology	2011
Garissa University College (EU)	Garissa	Moi University	2011
Taita Taveta University College (JKUAT)	Voi	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2011
Dedan Kimathi University of Technology	Nyeri	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2012
Chuka University	Chuka	Egerton University	2012
Technical University of Kenya	Nairobi	University of Nairobi	2013
Technical University of Mombasa	Mombasa	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2013
Pwani University	Kilifi	Kenyatta University	2013
Kisii University	Kisii	Egerton University	2013
University of Eldoret	Eldoret	Moi University	2013
Maasai Mara University	Narok	Moi University	2013
Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology	Kisumu	Maseno University	2013
Laikipia University	Laikipia	Egerton University	2013
South Eastern Kenya University	Kitui	Kenyatta University	2013
Multimedia University of Kenya	Nairobi	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2013
University of Kabianga	Kericho	Moi University	2013
Karatina University	Karatina	Moi University	2013
Meru University of Science and Technology	Meru	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology	2013

In the first decade following independence, Kenya, like many newly independent African nations, fully subsidised higher education, resulting in free tuition and a living stipend for most students (Wangenge-Ouma, 2008). This proved fiscally unsustainable and a loan programme was developed in the mid-1970s to provide funds for accommodation, books, subsistence, and travel while keeping tuition free. However, funds for this programme quickly were exhausted because no mechanism was established for loan repayment and recipients were simply expected to honour their obligation and regularly send the government an instalment (Ngome, 2003). Pressure from the World Bank to develop post-secondary education cos-sharing models resulted in modest tuition fee policies in 1991 along with a new loan programme available to all students regardless of economic need (Johnstone, 2002; Marcucci, Johnstone & Ngolovoi, 2008; Wangenge-Ouma, 2008). Students protested these fees by damaging university property and the government responded by sending all students home for the remainder of the semester.

Admissions policies

Admission to Kenya's public universities is granted by the Joints Admissions Board (JAB), which determines which institution a government-funded applicant will attend and the degree programme to which they will be admitted. JAB's decisions are based on institutional capacity, the overall quality of the applicant pool, and national needs. This process helps ensure the most qualified and academically prepared students are admitted. The public generally supported this approach, as it appeared egalitarian, objective, and checked bribery (Ngolovoi, 2010). However, JAB-admitted applicants are required to wait a full year after graduating from secondary school to matriculate.

In 1998, Kenya adopted a dual track admissions policy that required universities to admit self-paying (Module II) students under a much more flexible set of academic criteria. Students admitted under this policy join those already admitted under the existing merit-based system. Although some institutions have reduced the number of vacancies for JAB students in high-demand programmes to accommodate more fee-paying students, the policy's net effect has been to dramatically increase the number of students attending public universities without requiring additional government expenditure (Kiamba, 2003). At U of N and KU, the number of these self-funded students actually surpasses the regularly admitted students ("More students in Module ll courses," 2010), essentially doubling annual enrolments without providing additional infrastructure (Marcucci, Johnstone & Ngolovoi, 2008) or support for student welfare (Kiamba, 2003).

Ongoing tension exists between the regularly admitted and the self-paying students. Students admitted through the traditional process believe that they properly earned a seat while their self-paying counterparts simply bought their way into university, since 89 per cent of Module II students come from high and middle income families (Marcucci, Johnstone & Ngolovoi, 2008; Otieno, 2005). Adding to the insult, self-paying students can matriculate immediately following secondary school and, because many come from wealthier families (Ibid.) may have access to nicer accommodation near the campus.

Political influence of the government on campuses

post-colonial Kenyan higher education has been defined by a strong symbiotic relationship with the national government, which frequently points to its universities as a source of national pride. Although institutional funding was not guaranteed and the process for determining resource allocation not transparent, the government always provided enough financial support to keep the universities operating. However, for decades universities and colleges were co-opted into regional and national ethnic politics (Wanzala, 2013). Kenya's president serves as honorary chancellor of each public university and appoints prominent individuals to serve in his place (Munene, 2013). Although these positions are honorary with limited statutory responsibilities, their powers can extend to the appointment of other key administrators (Sifuna, 2012; Wanzala, 2013). One result is that university leadership often has strong ties to the political party in office and has vested interests in local and national elections. These connections bring into question institutional autonomy and academic freedom as some university leaders take active steps to limit faculty and student criticism of the government and institutional policies (Sifuna, 2012). Another result is that university leaders may be appointed based on political affiliation and nepotism rather than experience and ability (Wanzala, 2013).

Student groups in particular have criticised the government for the mismanagement of public affairs and ongoing economic and social crises. Although unconstitutional, the most powerful of these student groups have been de-registered by the government and student newspapers censored. Instead of supporting these groups or providing them with alternative outlets for expressing their concerns, university administrators frequently work to find ways to silence and disband them.

Tribalism and ethnic conflict impact on campuses

Tribal and ethnic affiliation is a defining aspect of post-colonial Kenyan society. While tribes existed before colonisation, identities and affiliations were fluid and based largely on language, geography, and kinships (Parsons, 2012). Post-independence, "ethnicity replaced social class as the platform by which to negotiate access to state resources and power" (Munene, 2013, p. 48) and members of the most populous tribes tended to win national elections because voters feared the consequences if another tribe came to power. Although there is not room to fully explore the role of tribal and ethnic politics in this article, it is important to note that tribal affiliation and national electoral politics result in the government's active recruitment and courting of each university's undergraduate student union or government. Electoral, state, institutional and student fee funds, along with private gifts, are often intermingled for political events supporting a candidate, creating immense tension between students from different tribes. The frustration and tension that can develop between the tribes was demonstrated following the disputed 2008 national election. Violence resulted in over 1 300 deaths and the displacement of 600 000 Kenyans (Kanyinga, 2009). Universities were closed and numerous faculty members and administrators resigned their positions fearing for their lives (Munene, 2013). Reforms

implemented in Kenya's 2010 Constitution prevent unilateral presidential decisions about resource allocation directly affecting tribal homelands, although it is difficult to believe that the role of ethnicity in resource allocation will be eliminated in the short term.

Early Kenyan student affairs

Little is written about student services in Kenya's universities that does not focus primarily on student unrest. The earliest and one of the few accounts of Kenyan student affairs found it housed predominately in the academic realm of the university although somewhat decentralised (Hughes, 1990) and focusing mostly on basic student services such as accommodation, food, and counselling. Then, as now, most senior student service positions are staffed by faculty members appointed to administrative positions. A *de facto* philosophy of *in loco parentis* was generally accepted but is now less tolerated by students who must overcome numerous real-world obstacles to remain enrolled.

The literature that does exist is a combination of peer-reviewed manuscripts and dissertations focusing on guidance and counselling in areas of course selection and personal adjustment. Guidance and counselling offices were established at KU in 1984 and had the only staff specifically trained for student affairs (Hughes, 1990). Twenty years later, counselling offices exist at all public universities and are often the only student services professionals with specific training.

The vice-chancellor committee report, "Causes of Disturbances/Riots in Public Universities" (2000), implicitly suggests that a reason for emphasising guidance and counselling is to appropriately assist students' adolescent inability to cope with the freedoms of university life, which may lead to drug abuse, withdrawal, anxiety and demonstrations. It recommends that all academic and administrative staff be trained in basic principles of guidance and counselling, and that institutions establish mechanisms for effectively handling student complaints about teaching, accountability, unfairness, bias and sexual harassment. Largely absent are suggestions about involving students in campus decision-making, addressing the root causes of the riots, or recognition of students as independent thinkers.

The large amount of high quality scholarship addressing numerous topics in Kenyan higher education provides a comprehensive overview of issues facing faculty, administrators, government, economy and society. The lack of literature addressing the services that support students and their co-curricular activities is problematic because the acquisition of social and personal competencies is important to a high functioning democratic society.

Study methodology and methods

Data for this study was collected over a six-week visit in 2010. We used intrinsic case study methodology to guide data collection for its ability to focus on a bounded system, which can be an "individual, a specific programme, a process, and institution" (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 53). Case study is generally ideal for exploring complex naturalistic social systems typically composed of multiple variables, especially when a study's goal is to expand the reader's knowledge of the particular case (Merriam, 2001). Intrinsic case study is used

when researchers have a personal interest in the case, are able to pre-identify the boundaries of the case, and are interested in understanding the particulars of a case (Stake, 1995; 2000).

Data collection

After spending three weeks in Nairobi and a rural village acculturating to Kenya, we visited seven university campuses for between one and three days for arranged and impromptu meetings, learning about the various services offered to students and the challenges faced by the staff. The seven institutions, which appear first in Table 1, included each of the public universities established prior to 2010 and did not include any branch or constituent colleges. Prior to these visits, we spoke at length with several Kenyan student affairs professionals who work in the US, numerous Kenyans working in education-related NGOs, and former university administrators. During the visits we met with over 50 staff, faculty, and students including vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors, deans of students, assistant deans of students, chaplains, catering managers, accommodation and housing managers, counsellors, student health managers, public relations officers, recreation managers, financial aid officers, deans of academic colleges or units, student leaders and alumni. On the recommendation of individuals we spoke to prior to visiting campuses, the meetings were conducted in a conversational manner and not recorded. We do not identify individuals by name and sometimes reverse gender identifiers in order to maintain their confidentiality and safety.

We collected numerous institutional documents from student services and the public relations offices at each institution. These documents generally included student handbooks, brochures, annual reports and strategic plans. We supplemented these documents with a review of institutional and departmental websites for each university if available.

Data analysis

Data from the campus visits were analysed using open-coding to categorise themes that emerged (Gibbs, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Based on African higher education literature, we expected certain themes to emerge, such as revenue pressures and funding decreases. However, the inductive nature of open-coding allowed new themes to emerge regarding how participants believed funding and revenue pressures impacted student affairs and students. We also analysed the documents using an inductive qualitative content analysis procedure to identify themes. To help ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, we compared the campus visit data, documents, and existing literature (Gibbs, 2007; Whitt, 2001). We then discussed our findings with a key informant to ensure credibility and accuracy, a Kenyan-born student affairs professional who was educated in the US.

Researchers' perspectives

Our perspectives are informed by a Western-centric worldview. We are both US-born scholars and former student affairs practitioners, having earned our degrees at US colleges and universities. Our initial conversations about this study concerned the appropriateness of two western professors collecting data and writing about higher education in a

post-colonial country. We proceeded only with the encouragement of a Kenyan-born gatekeeper and an understanding that we would conduct regular check-ins with Kenyan nationals and educators to discuss our observations and preliminary findings. We approach our data collection and analysis with an open mind and employ a variety of methods to help ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. However, readers should understand that our views and findings about what constitutes challenges come from a privileged position. Our intent with this study is to be critical but not to criticise.

It is important to note that throughout our data collection process Kenya was actively engaged in a national conversation about a new constitution, which was approved by voters in 2010. The new constitution formally separates branches of government to provide the checks and balances of power necessary in a democracy, and creates several commissions empowered to investigate ethics violations and government compensation. Statements we make regarding the government's role in higher education or ability to make unilateral decisions should be weighed in this context.

Challenges for Kenyan student affairs

The data analysis finds that student affairs professionals in Kenya are presented with three overarching challenges that manifest uniquely at each institution depending on its history and geographic proximity to Nairobi. In general, because U of N and KU are located in the capital and share significant history, they tend to have similar issues compared to the newer institutions located in more rural parts of the county.

Challenge 1: Increasing cost of attendance

As the Kenyan government pushes for the massification of higher education, it has also adopted policies to shift the cost of attendance to individual students and their families during an era of weak economic performance (Fehnel, 2003). The resulting enrolment increases and pressure on students to afford higher education present the greatest challenges to student services staff and institutions. At U of N and KU, the most established and financially stable institutions, most of the student interviewees talked about ongoing frustration with tuition and fee increases that are seemingly never accompanied with an increase in services or the quality of education. Some government-funded students at these institutions discussed withdrawing from school because they could not afford basic necessities such as rent, transportation, and school supplies which have increased dramatically over the past few years, after paying their tuition and fees. One assistant dean of students explained, "Students are told the increases are necessary for all sorts of reasons, such as [faculty] raises or new buildings, but if you are from here [Kenya] you know that the money doesn't stay here." Students at the newer institutions also expressed concerns about their finances.

While nearly every student we spoke to believed that a degree was essential to gainful employment, a disproportionate number of women indicated having thoughts about returning home to assist with domestic income and work. While often citing the financial

cost of attendance, we also heard stories about the hardships students' families experienced due to their not being at home. For example, one female stated, "I know it is tough on my mother. There are two that are younger than me. I used to be responsible for caring for them and now that I am here, she is overwhelmed."

Dual-track enrolment policies were supposed to generate additional revenues for institutions and student welfare services but the latter never materialised (Kiamba, 2003). A few western graduate students studying at U of N stated that the full-paying students' use of services, when added to the existing load, stretches the resources available to front-line staff past a point of sustainability. One student stated, "It doesn't seem like the [student services] staff are able to help too much, because they feel like there is too much to do, too many students."

At each institution, students, faculty and student service staff expressed frustration about the cost increases because they are perceived as antithetical to the foundations of Kenyan higher education, which many reminded us was to produce individuals who would serve the nation. One KU faculty member said, "I think we have lost our way. This is a very good institution but we make it difficult for many students to have the education they deserve and we need in the country. Unless the economy improves many of these students will have no way to pay back their loans. It was not what was first envisioned for the university." A faculty member at U of N, who had close ties with the government, saw cost increases in a more practical light, stating, "What we had was unsustainable once we starting opening new universities. We should really only be subsidising the most needy undergraduate degrees and encouraging more private options. There are just too many other things the government needs to do."

Challenge 2: Impact on student behaviours and actions
At Kenya's more rural universities, increasing costs and ongoing economic problems exacerbate existing social conditions in more profound ways. Hunger, prostitution, exploitive relationships and HIV/AIDS were identified as significant problems by student service professional at each institution we visited, although a few senior administrators downplayed the magnitude of each.

Hunger and catering revenue. Administrators and faculty at the non-urban universities reported that hunger, especially late in the semester, is an ongoing problem for students who mismanage their loans. After receiving their loans at the beginning of each semester, students dine at restaurants and order meat and alcohol. By mid-semester, they begin eating at the more affordable campus cantines. Near the end of the semester, many students are cooking in their rooms, a dangerous practice banned at universities because resulting fires and electrical blackouts have led to student unrest or rioting. For example, Egerton University experienced significant infrastructure damage following student riots over blackouts in 2009 (Mkawale, 2009). As final exams approach, deans report students not eating for days and begging for food money. As such, deans have developed budgeting workshops and offer small financial aid scholarships to cover basic food costs but with little success. Masinde Muliro University

proactively built kitchenettes into its new hostel (university apartments), but converted them to student bedrooms at significant cost due to space issues.

Catering is a significant revenue source at these institutions and, at least in concept, these funds are used to offset operating costs, although students questioned if this actually happens. Numerous administrators worry that as institutions move towards full cost recovery models and implement a "no fees, no registration policy" (Mwiria, Ng'ethe, Ngome, Ouma-Odero, Wawire & Wesonga, 2007), more students will be prevented from registering for classes. These market-oriented policy trends, it is believed, will result in more students engaging in unhealthy behaviours to afford tuition and basic necessities.

Prostitution. Prostitution among college women, and increasingly men, to pay universities fees has been reported in the popular media and was discussed at each campus (Ambuka, 2012; Genga, 2010; Ngira, 2009; Oduor, 2010; "Strange double life in a city hostel," 2009). Several counsellors and deans observed that prostitution is increasingly a solution for students facing hunger or homelessness. One counsellor stated, "We have developed educational programmes explaining the dangers and the importance of safe sex but we have almost no power to intervene with the actual behaviour." Of particular concern to administrators are pregnancy and the transmission of HIV/Aids. A dean stated, "We don't have the resources to care for babies or ill students, so we must move them off campus or encourage them to go home until they are able to resume their studies." Another dean lamented, "A few of our students resort to this [prostitution] because they believe so much in the degree, in the promise of education. We try to provide options, but with the pressure to stay in school, they sometimes see no other option."

Live-in relationships. An alternative to prostitution, on-campus and off-campus live-in relationships, are based on an understanding that a woman will cohabitat with a man in exchange for cleaning, meal-preparation and sex. Also known as 'trial marriages,' these arrangements require that the male student pay for the female's fees and tuition. While this may seem like a pragmatic solution to increasing attendance costs, these arrangements often only last a year. Each fall, with the arrival of new female students to campus, the older men "rush" to break up with their current girlfriends and find a younger women for a live-in relationship in what is known as the "Gold Rush" (Lime, 2010). Nearly all the staff we spoke with stated they explain this to the women during new student orientation but the trend has increased over the past decade. A dean observed that, "Once a man has found a new girlfriend, there are not many options for the women who now need to find money for tuition and a place to live. Most of them came from single sex secondary schools and this was their first relationship […] they thought it would last."

While many of the deans we spoke to expressed concerns about the effects of these behaviours on students, few had the resources to develop large-scale, ongoing programming initiatives to educate students about the potential consequences of their behaviours or provide alternative accommodation. Instead, the general approach developed from a guidance and counselling model that focuses on dealing with the problems of individuals, or small groups of students, who present a specific problem.

Challenge 3: Lack of training and senior leadership

It is clear from our data that Kenya's ruling political party directly appoints individuals to the public university's most senior administrative positions based on loyalty and a willingness to support its agenda. Appointees, who frequently began as faculty members and held advanced degrees from US or British universities, often view their positions as stepping-stones to more senior positions and an opportunity to demonstrate their administrative talents. Unfortunately, at several institutions, these individuals have little preparation for managing university resources or an understanding of student affairs. As one candid dean of students reflected, "I was approached by the vice-chancellor and told that I was going to serve as the dean of students. This was not the position I expected because I have never worked in the field. The vice-chancellor knows I will support him. I am still learning but I know it is a good way to demonstrate my administrative skills." Another dean explained he was excited by the prospect of providing the types of services he experienced at a US graduate school, although he had little supervisory experience and was still in the process of understanding his job functions. Several deans we spoke with approached their work as a series of never-ending administrative tasks that included balancing a constantly fluctuating budget, allocating resources "that only exist on paper", and ensuring student problems did not escalate. These deans usually had limited interaction with the student services staff they supervised or with students unless it involved some type of crisis. During conversations with various service units it became apparent that lower-level employees understood the limitations associated with these appointments but also accepted that patronage was the way Kenyan higher education operated.

Our interviewees who worked in frontline positions at these institutions discussed several challenges resulting from the appointment of underprepared, and sometimes uninterested, individuals into senior student affairs positions. Although few spoke directly about their dean's, they suggested that 'some' of their leaders were unconcerned with the performance of the unit or services it delivered but instead spent much of their time making sure students and staff were not engaged in activities that might publically embarrass the institution and vice-chancellor. This focus on avoiding embarrassment trickles down throughout the organisation. A career counsellor stated, "Even in our positions, this becomes part of how we work, thinking about how something we might do could become a problem. It doesn't matter how good you are at your job if you say anything critical of the government." An advisor who worked with the student government added, "I spend a lot of my time explaining to students how something might look to the vice-chancellor, but I don't think they care too much, which is the real challenge of my job."

Another issue with having unqualified senior administrators is that they are unable to provide training or professional development. At several universities, the staff discussed the need for training but realised that their dean had less experience than they did. When professional training opportunities have been made available through processional associations, participants explained that their deans forbid them from attending, even at their own expense. One professional staff member explained that, "There is a general concern

that attending professional meetings is a threat to the dean, that we will organise ourselves or say something negative about our dean. We are prohibited from attending [professional] meetings because he is worried about his reputation." In one instance, a dean attempted to have a meeting with other university deans but the vice-chancellors thwarted this because they feared the deans would rally the students to protest or riot against administration and the government.

Misappropriation of funds. A longtime counsellor raised another issue associated with appointing senior professionals based on political patronage. She said, "It always takes a long time for a dean [of students] to adjust to the position and, well, finding out where the resources are." It was clear to us, and later confirmed by a key informant, that she was referring to what US administrators would refer to as a misappropriation of university resources. We heard similar references to resource allocation at several campuses. Although no one stated that senior administrators were stealing directly from their institutions, it was clear that these individuals often have large extended families dependent on them for jobs. "It might mean someone gets a job driving the dean or working in catering, or a construction contract for a building that will never actually be used."

Challenge 4. Campus closures

Kenyan universities are the centre of the country's political activism and exist in a constant state of tension with the government. Student protests and riots, which can turn deadly, are usually addressed by the government closing the university. In fact, for much of the time we were in Kenya, U of N was officially closed and undergraduate students sent home following the involvement of senior administrators in the election of a new student union president. KU had also been closed the previous year after student protests over examination dates resulted in one student dead and the destruction of several building. The most significant closures occurred in conjunction with the 2008 post-election violence, which resulted not only in students being sent home but also some staff members being forced to resign their positions out of safety concerns.

Campus closures are obviously unpredictable and, at some universities, very uncommon. Closures may only last a few days while in a few cases they can last a semester. However, the violence and damage that precipitates closures result in additional community distrust, redirected resources and unfulfilled educational goals. At U of N and KU, many of the student service staff we met seemed to have accepted closures as unfortunate but inevitable. One observed, "You always think about what might happen, how students from one tribe or party will react to something and the others will respond to that."

Once universities reopen, staff suggested that normal campus routines return relatively quickly for most students and staff. A faculty member stated, "The student instigators have been dealt with and someone from the administration will listen to concerns, but there is little effort to make up for missed coursework. Some students graduate having missed almost a year due to closures. But the best we can hope for is that it won't happen again for a while." At a few universities we were shown the damage caused by students during the last

protests, some of which is left intentionally unrepaired so that students could see the results of their behaviour.

Discussion and conclusion

Kenya has spent the last 40 years trying to 'Africanise' a nation whose formal institutions, language and bureaucratic practices were inherited from colonial times (Williams & Gona, 2013). Its system of higher education was established in the belief that an educated citizenry was essential to a meritocratic, independent and prosperous nation. However, economic problems and market-based reforms have exerted tremendous pressures on its universities to produce the educated workforce needed to lead the country back to prosperity. Although Western universities are experiencing similar pressures, they tend to have many more resources to draw on and a much larger, trained support staff in student affairs to help manage the increase in students and demand.

Unlike many of their Western counterparts, Kenya's universities largely approach student services as a set of discrete functions for students to use when needed. We did sense from several conversations that some vice-chancellors and dean of students educated in Westernised countries were actively working to adopt a more holistic and proactive approach to providing services. This will be challenging because of the resources required and the need to move forward from the guidance and counselling model currently used. One approach to addressing this could be the development of a degree programme at one or more Kenyan universities focusing on student affairs theory and best practices. This would help to create a group of skilled professional student services practitioners with intimate knowledge of Kenya's unique history and traditions.

At the heart of the existing model of student services is the ever-present and legitimate concern that students will again riot. Because university leaders are so closely connected to the government, there is worry that the inability to control student riots reflects poorly on the president. However, this constant concern is anathema to working with students in a collegial, collaborative and holistic fashion. One of the functions of student services in Western countries is to actively engage students with their concerns and find constructive methods for expressing themselves and finding viable solutions. For this to occur requires a firm belief that students, although often still transitioning into adulthood, will most often participate in dialogue about an existing problem if they are engaged by institutional leaders.

The four challenges we identify facing student services at Kenya's public universities are the result of competing pressures and are manifestations of its unique culture, history and traditions. They are not 'problems' solely for student services professionals to solve or overcome but issues for practitioners and policy makers to consider when planning for the future of Kenyan higher education. Given the existing concerns institutional leaders have about authority and centralised decision-making, the national government would need to renegotiate its relationships with the universities for this to evolve.

Kenya's existing student services model developed to meet the needs of a modest enrolment of academically talented government-sponsored students. The addition of

self-funded students has strained existing student services resources beyond sustainable capacity. Although there is great variation in each institution's infrastructure, affordable and safe housing is a persistent issue at all campuses. The most entrepreneurial institutions are engaging in joint ventures with the private sector to build additional housing at little cost to the institution. It is too early to determine if these new housing efforts will curb the need for prostitution or live-in relationships but it seems likely they will at least provide affordable, safe housing options for some students. From our participants' perspectives, this is a critical missing piece at most universities.

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