



## Key Theories

Below you can find more information on the key theories the Department of Student Life at Michigan State University utilizes in grounding the work we do when engaging with our Registered Student Organizations.

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### **A.W. Astin (Student Involvement Theory, 1984)**

Alexander Astin's theory of Student Involvement explains how desirable outcomes for institutions of higher education are viewed in relation to how students change and develop as a result of being involved co-curricularly. The core concepts of the theory are composed of three elements. The first, a student's "inputs" such as their demographics, their background, and any previous experiences. The second is the student's "environment", which accounts for all of the experiences a student would have during college. Lastly, there are "outcomes" which cover a student's characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values that exist after a student has graduated college.

Astin also created five basic assumptions about involvement. He argued that:

1. Involvement requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy.
  2. Involvement is continuous, and that the amount of energy invested varies from student to student.
  3. Aspects of involvement may be qualitative and quantitative.
  4. What a student gains from being involved (or their development) is directly proportional to the extent to which they were involved (in both aspects of quality and quantity).
  5. Academic performance is correlated with the student involvement.
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### **V. Tinto (Model of Student Departure, 1993)**

Vincent Tinto (1993) identifies three major sources of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's "Model of Institutional Departure" states that, to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems.



## **B. Magolda (Theory of Self Authorship, 2004)**

Baxter Magolda defines self-authorship as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” and answers the three following questions: How do I know? Who Am I? How do I want to construct relationships with others?

Four phases towards self-authorship:

- Phase 1: Following Formulas—allowing others to define who you are, “young adults follow the plans laid out for them” while assuring themselves they created these plans themselves (p.185)
- Phase 2: Crossroads—The plans a student has been following do not necessarily fit anymore, and new plans need to be established. Students are dissatisfied with self. As student development professionals, we should be extremely adept at seeing this stage and know how to guide our students to a life of purpose when they are at the “crossroads.”
- Phase 3: Becoming the Author of One’s Life—creating the ability to choose own beliefs and stand up for them (especially when facing conflict or opposing views)
- Phase 4: Internal Foundation—“grounded in their self-determined belief system, in their sense of who they are, and the mutuality of their relationships” (p. 186)
- In order to develop a strong internal foundation, students need to trust the internal voice and build an internal foundation.

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## **S.R. Komives (Social Change Model of Leadership Development, 2009)**

The Social Change Model (SCM) of Leadership Development particularly appeals to undergraduate students because it’s an approach to leadership development that views leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that uses multiple perspectives to enact positive social change. The SCM, emphasizes a nonhierarchical approach to leadership. “Key assumptions” upon which the model is based include:

- Leadership is collaborative. Effective leadership is based on, collective action, shared power, and a passionate commitment “to social justice.”
- Leadership is the process a group experiences as it works collaboratively toward a goal. It is not the acts of an individual with authority.
- Leadership is based on values. To have the trust necessary for collective action, students and groups must be clear about their values and consistent with actions.
- All students can do leadership. Leadership development is not reserved for students holding leadership positions, but is for any student wanting to engage with others to create change.
- Leadership is about change. Effective leadership involves being able to accomplish positive change for others and for the community.