

pus. The results obtained become the driving force for process improvement on one's campus. This format harnesses the power of benchmarking in a non-threatening manner that will lead to continuous improvement of programs and services for our campuses' orientation programs and students.

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## ARTICLE

### Student Affairs: A Mission Unto Itself?

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*The text of this essay was derived from a speech to the 1997 Mississippi Chief Student Affairs Officers Conference; thus, it is written in an informal style. This article is meant to provide a wake-up call to our profession as we enter an era that will be unlike any other. We must link ourselves to the institutional academic mission, focus on student learning, and prepare for reengineering and other quality/efficiency efforts.*

Higher education is under siege at the present time. Faculty are being attacked, student affairs is being attacked, and research on students indicates that they are not meeting the expectations of their employers either. What I would like to do in this essay is establish a framework in which we explore the role of faculty, gain some understanding of today's students, provide some insights regarding student affairs, and then discuss the implications of this material relative to our own direction in collaboration with academic affairs.

In a book entitled *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education* (commonly known as the Wingspread Report), it is noted that higher education is out of touch with society; it is provider driven; it is institution centered and not student centered; that the best faculty rarely see freshmen; and that the "American imperative for the 21st century is that society must hold higher education to much higher expectations or risk national decline" (Wingspread Group, 1993, p. 1).

At a recent fundraising conference, I was listening to a highly respected, retired professional in the field of student affairs talk about fundraising, and he was asked about the relationship with academic affairs and whether there is some conflict when trying to fundraise when that side of the house is also engaged in this activity. His comment was, "To hell with academic affairs". Many of us, at some point in our careers, have probably wanted to utter those words, but have never had the courage to do so. The statement, however, was made with so much force behind it that I flinched when I heard it, and I was concerned about the tone of voice that was utilized.

Faculty in this country are currently under considerable fire. A 1993 *Wall Street Journal* article entitled "College Teachers, the New Leisure Class" indicated that faculty throughout the country teach an average of 10 hours a week, and this average is considerably inflated because it includes the full time community college instructors who average 15-16 hours. Faculty spend about four hours a week on research and scholarly writing, and they spend no more than eight hours a week counseling students or attending meetings. Faculty also report that they prepare for one hour for each hour of classroom teaching. If you add up those hours, on an average one could conclude that faculty mem-

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bers work approximately 32 hours a week and that they work only 30 weeks per year. That opinion is shared by many throughout this country and has tremendous implications regarding the pressure that is currently being placed on higher education. An October 1996 article about tenure in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported the results of research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA in which it was discovered that more than 1/3 of the faculty in this country agreed or strongly agreed that tenure is an outmoded concept. What is interesting about these findings is that the proportion of scholars with the biggest increase in skepticism about tenure since a survey conducted in 1989 was professors aged 45-54.

According to Ernest Boyer, in his book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, "In the current climate, students are all too often the losers. Today, undergraduates are aggressively recruited. In glossy brochures, they're assured that teaching is important, that a spirit of community pervades the campus, and that general education is the core of the undergraduate experience. But the reality is that, on far too many campuses, teaching is not well rewarded, and faculty who spend too much time counseling and advising students may diminish their prospects for tenure and promotion" (Boyer, 1990, pp. xi-xii). He indicates that colleges and universities are also weakened in the confusion over institutional goals. "The recent Carnegie Foundation study of student life revealed growing social separations and divisions on campus, increased acts of incivility, and a deepening concern that the spirit of community has diminished" (Boyer, 1990, p. xii).

Who are these students who are the losers in higher education today, as mentioned by Boyer? What are these students like? If we go back to a study that was conducted in the mid 60's about high school seniors and was replicated a few years ago, we learn something about the nature of today's students. In that study, high school principals and teachers were asked, "What are the greatest problems that you face with your students?" What follows are the five greatest problems then and now.

Back in the mid 60's the fifth greatest problem was failure to secure a hall pass versus now it is gangs and gang culture. The fourth greatest problem was getting out of line in a drill and now it is destruction of school property. The third greatest problem at that time was inappropriate dress and now it is physical assault and harassment. The second greatest problem thirty years ago was holding hands and now it is cheating. And the greatest problem in the mid 60's in high schools was chewing gum, while now it is drugs and substance abuse (Komives, October, 1990). This information speaks volumes regarding the nature of the students that we see today and it makes me think we certainly have our work cut out for us.

Today's students utilize their time somewhat differently than students of preceding generations, and in an article in the 1996 November/December issue of *Change* magazine, Ted Marchese notes that current research on student use of time indicates that students spend 15-18 hours a week in class (or at least they are supposed to). They spend approximately 20 hours per week watching television, 20 hours per week working part time jobs, 20 hours a week hanging out, relaxing, or partying, and 10 hours per week studying. The article goes on to say that, "Gone everywhere, it seems, is the old under-

standing that college takes three hours of studying outside class for every one in" (Marchese, 1996, p.4). In preparation for the rigors of college, today's high school seniors study an average of four hours per week. The article does not blame students as it points out that one needs only to look at their grades which are predominately A's and B's. The average high school grade point average now is over 3.0.

Now, let's look at our own profession. In July, 1995, the division of student affairs at the University of Oregon disappeared. It was disassembled and moved into various other areas within the university. The same occurred recently at Northern Illinois University. I report through the provost at my institution, as do many of today's student affairs chief executive officers. Other universities are going through the same process now as reengineering takes hold. Downsizing advocate, Alan Guskin, writes "The more professionalized an administrative area becomes, the more its size seems to grow to perform 'needed services.' The services may be real, but the cumulative costs soon become too great for the institutions to afford" (1994a, p. 27). Guskin adds, "It is just possible that if we reduce administrative and student services expenses by 25 to 33 percent and the size of the faculty by 25 to 33 percent, we might be able to hold down student costs" (1994b, p. 25). This type of thinking is quite an indictment on what we do. To counter that, however, Alexander Astin (1993) indicates that the research clearly shows that an investment of money into student services does in fact pay off. It is still a hard case for us to build. Based upon what we know about our profession and the difficulty that we sometimes face, I think it is time that we seriously address who we are, what we are, and what others might think we are.

I strongly believe that student affairs has, over the years, become very arrogant. I think that the student development model that we subscribed to without question in the early seventies has not served us well. Many current professionals have spent much of their careers trying to become equal partners with faculty, and they have been unsuccessful in that venture no matter how hard many of them have worked. In the 1994 book, *Reform in Student Affairs: A Critique of Student Development*, Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers provide an excellent critique of the student development model and a reappraisal of the role of our profession. They indicate that one of the more serious problems with our profession is that we adopted the student development model without any critique and that the model was in fact deficient and, "Its deficiencies included a disregard for the mission, goals, and roles of higher education itself as well as its relationship to the larger society" (1994, p. 91). The writers argue that, "Student development theory per se does not exist; instead the field has a disparate collection of theoretical perspectives from which various theories are selected campus-by-campus, professional-by-professional" (p.92). They indicate that, "Student development was expected to provide the profession with a basis upon which to claim expertise regarding students; i.e., a new role purporting to elevate student affairs practitioners from being service-providers to student development educators and, thus, becoming more closely aligned with the faculty" (p. 93). They found, unfortunately, little evidence to support this claim in our practice. As a result, they advocate alternative approaches as we look toward the future.

The writers argue that we must start by exploring the mission of higher education

with a particular focus on how that mission relates to students. "However the college or university may define its mission, it becomes a reality primarily through the efforts of the instructional faculty.... If the institutional mission also includes the encouragement of the personal development of students,... the student affairs component has a very specific role in its actualization. What may not be as apparent or accepted is the role that student affairs can and often does play in relation to the academic program" (p. 96). They suggest that "student affairs can make a special contribution such as learning effective citizenship, creating learning communities, developing cultural and artistic environments, teaching acceptance of cultural and racial diversity, orienting students to the collegiate way of life, exploring career and leisure options, and involving students in the fabric of student life..." (p. 96).

Bloland, Stamatakos, and Rogers (1994) also believe that student affairs made two strategic mistakes; first, that the field was in error by considering all aspects of the development of students as being equal. For example, is it just as important for the college experience to develop students' emotional and physical potential as it is their intellectual potential? They think perhaps not. Second, student affairs made another mistake by assuming that student development was the educational mission; that it is not, that the educational mission is learning and the focus must be on what is learned, not on what is developed. The answer, according to these writers, is to look back more than fifty years to the Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1949) statement that had its origins in the 1940's, and devote our concern to the whole student. Many of us have been doing this already, but it should be revisited. The difference is that this time, rather than assuming equality in all aspects of students' development, the field should give increased attention to the academic and intellectual development processes, to the learning environment, and to the entire educational process. Their recommendations are that we "cease identifying with the student development model....; return to the general principles so cogently expressed in the Student Personnel Point of View clearly placing academic and intellectual development at the center of the student affairs mission....; re-emphasize the primacy of learning as the cardinal value of higher education....; clearly identify with the institutional educational mission....; [and] seek ways to participate more fully in the academic life of the parent college or university..." (pp. 104-105).

At this particular time in our history, it is probably more important than ever that we remain current with all the literature that is available in higher education, not just in student affairs. We are a profession under siege at this particular moment. Over the last five years, on an annual basis, over fifty percent of the public institutions in this country have had budget cuts. That knowledge in itself should provide a wake up call for our profession. We all know when budget cuts occur, we are likely to get hit first and perhaps hardest. If there was ever a time for us to reach out to the academic side of the house, to embrace the mission of learning in our institutions, it is now. I would also suggest that it is time to reorganize and reengineer within our own divisions. It is time to take a very critical look at every function we perform and every position in our divisions. What is the value of each program that we operate? Are we putting our money into places where student learning is going to best occur? Are we doing the kinds of

things that we need to do to increase enrollment and retention on our campuses? It is apparent to me that if we do not make the tough decisions, that others will do this for us. We need to understand that the academic mission of the university is the primary mission and that our role is to support and complement that mission. We are not the mission. Our actions over the next five years will be critical in terms of how we survive the onslaught that higher education currently faces.

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