

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. FRAN STAGE

J. J. Thorp

Dr. Fran Stage is in her second year on the faculty at Indiana University. She has a B.S. in Mathematics from the University of Miami (1972), an M.S. in Mathematics from Drexel University (1973), and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Student Affairs from Arizona State University (1986).

You had an interesting history, kind of an atypical background. How did you get into the student affairs field?

I began by teaching math in college. I did that for seven or eight years. As I was teaching math, I became more and more fascinated with certain aspects of education. How do students learn and why do they drop out? I taught at a community college and at Arizona State University. In both cases I had students who would be doing fine, then they would disappear. After a number of years, I became interested in some of the things that didn't have to do with math equations. These things prompted me to go back to school and get a degree in higher education.

As I studied what helps students learn and why they succeed, I began to formulate my own hypotheses. I would read research and think of different approaches. I became interested in doing studies myself. In my first year, several professors asked me to work with them on an article tracking grade inflation to test for a cohort effect. Were the incoming classes indeed brighter than the previous students or was there grade inflation? Working on that paper was fun and interesting; more fun and interesting than classes. My career path began to turn in that direction as I got positive feedback. Toward the end of my studies, I looked for faculty positions. I looked at Indiana and Ohio State among others, and here I am.

What do you think of Indiana University so far?

I like I.U. One of the positive aspects is how supportive the faculty members are. I've always felt people value what I'm doing, and people always consult one another before they make decisions. They do all those important things that organizations should be doing, but don't always do. My work in the Academic Affairs office at A.S.U. gave me knowledge and experience with bad situations, so I appreciate this department. Nothing like a few bad experiences to help you appreciate the good ones.

Are you happy with the curricular change that have been made?

Yes, I am. Before the changes, we had a lock step curriculum. Everyone went through almost exactly the same courses. I think the new curriculum is a step in the direction of recognizing that student affairs is a broad field and there

are a wide range of interests among the students in the program. Although it may be easier to lock them all into the same program, we should allow some flexibility.

Do you see more changes in the near future?

Yes. Given Don's (Hossler) and my philosophy about this, I can't imagine us being locked in. I can see us making adjustments as we go, a flexible curriculum. It would be negative if we just locked into something and maintained it for 10 years because it was a lot of work to change. So as the years go by, the curriculum will evolve. As issues change, the special topics or one credit courses will change. Right now those issues seem to me to be fairly basic: the law, administrative practices, the multicultural campus.

Do you see any similarities in the students that come through the program at Indiana?

When I came to Indiana I wasn't sure what a large student affairs class would be like. I quickly decided one of the positive aspects of the program was the wide range of students. They run from one extreme to the other. Overall, I would say the students are professional and demanding, in a positive way, about their academics. Students are enthusiastic and positive. All those things fit together to make this a very exciting job. Students push me to do a better job. Being here at Indiana also pushes me to do a good job. There is a reputation here that I have to maintain. I have to maintain it in my research and in the students that we graduate from the program. We have many good students and that is real exciting.

What are your plans and goals for the future? The next 10 or 15 years?

If someone asked me what job I would have if I could have any job in the world, I would say a college professor. Here I am. In the next seven years I hope I'm still here. It would mean I have been successful in many ways; helping students move through the program, meeting their short term professional goals, helping people learn more about college students and their experiences on the college campus, and providing support and services to higher educational institutions in general. My long term goals follow from this. I see myself being a program head, but my medium range goals are what I'm focusing on.

Do you see any significant changes in the student affairs realm in the coming years?

I think the changes are going to be changes in approaches to issues rather than in the issues themselves. The issues are clear and I think we will spend the next ten years learning to deal with things differently. One of the biggest issues is the problem of the student who is not of the mainstream on the college campus. Not only minorities, the obvious minorities, but also the less visible minorities, the first generation college student, the learning disabled student, the gay or lesbian student, or the student who was abused as a child. It is becoming

clear that we have not been very successful in our efforts to help the minority students get along. Those students still leave at very high rates. I hope in the next 10 to 15 years there will be a change of attitude. We will stop noticing that student are black, or Hispanic. They will just be students and we will talk to them as individuals with an individual set of problems that could be just like the next person's. In order to do that, we have to do more listening and less reading about generalizations. The generalizations seem to have done more harm than good. We should help them as individuals.

Do you have any research that you're working on right now?

One of the most interesting things about my job is reading and generating ideas. I'm interested in student development theory and the trouble practitioners have using it. Students in my classes want to know how to connect theory and practice. The connection is always problematic. It's problematic in counseling, psychology, business, or in any field. It's easy to study business theory but, when you're managing a store, how do you apply Maslow's hierarchy of needs? Lately, I've become interested in that connection. Students in my classes will hear me talking about process models.

One of the gaps in student development theory literature is the lack of theory on minority students. It will be an area of focus for me in the next couple of years. Most of the theory has been developed based on mainstream people. The Perry theory is developed using males at Harvard. It will be interesting to see, and maybe be a part of, the expansion of those theories and their application.

There are a lot of highly quantitative studies about why students leave college, why students change majors and how we predict satisfaction or G.P.A. Separate from that literature are studies about who students are and how they develop. People who study outcomes don't pay much attention to who students are and how they develop. People who study who students are and how they develop don't pay much attention to the supposed positive outcomes we all want to help students attain. I'm interested in filling that gap with my research.

J.J. Thorp received a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from the University of Vermont in 1987. This past year, he served as the Assistant Coordinator of Read Center. He hopes to pursue a position in residence life upon receipt of a M.S. in Higher Education and Student Affairs in May, 1989.

ALCOHOL - THE PERENNIAL TOPIC One Dean's View

James W. Lyons

The subject of alcohol use and abuse is a topic that is almost always discussed when student affairs deans gather. A quick perusal of NASPA national and regional meetings over the past four decades will convince one that alcohol or related topics are a constant part of our professional dialogue. For many deans, a substantial amount of time is spent on alcohol issues on their respective campuses; crafting and enforcing policies and rules; and designing treatment and educational programs. During the past three decades, however, the topic has broadened. We now talk about substance abuse; alcohol is but one of many substances that are abused.

Are these matters that are often given short shift in professional training programs? It may be so, and if it is, it may be because, as a profession, we have always been a bit reluctant to fess up to our "control" functions. We talk more about our educational roles, and about individual development. Shaping and especially enforcing campus policies doesn't have nearly the same glamour. But like it or not, these roles are part of the work of our profession. If we approach them with skill, there can be strong connections made with our educational roles.

SOME COMMON "SLIPS" WHEN DISCUSSING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Talking about substance use and abuse can be tricky because the language is imprecise. Words and phrases often mean different things to different people.

When we refer to drug abuse, do we mean the simple use of illegal drugs? Is just using marijuana wrong? Or is it wrong only when someone uses too much of it? Or in the wrong place at the wrong time? How about "crack" and other forms of cocaine?

Where does alcohol fit in discussions about substance abuse? Are alcoholics drug abusers? Are people who are under 21 and drink too much abusers? Any more or less so than those over 21? Are under age drinkers who drink in moderation drug abusers?

In short, "drug or substance abuse" sometimes means unlawful drug use, or unhealthy drug use, or drug related activities that imperil others such as drunk driving. Sometimes it refers to unfair drug use (like gaining a competitive advantage over others in sports and exams).

As is so often the case when crafting or discussing policies, it is often wise to spend some time with the question, "What's the problem?" Clarify things