particularly if the larger objective--of improving student ability to make rational, informed choices--is to be achieved" (El-Khawas, 1977, p. 76). Advocates of student consumerism must now begin to develop methods to test the central hypothesis of their argument: that information on likely consequences of attending the institution can lead to more realistic expectations and, in turn, to better decisions.

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An Interview with Dave DeCoster

by Anthony Zizos

Basic career decisions can sometimes be a combination of external circumstances, intuition, luck...and a little planning.

David Arthur DeCoster has been the Director of Residence Life at Indiana University for almost seven years. He recently announced his acceptance of the Dean of Students position at the University of Nebraska starting in March, 1978. This interview will hopefully provide my colleagues the opportunity to become better acquainted with Dave, and further understand the process of professional development.

Q. *Where did you complete your undergraduate work, and what experiences during that time did you have in the area of student personnel?*

A. I began college study at the University of Michigan in mechanical engineering but, after my freshman year, I decided that this was not the field for me. That decision came shortly after my advisor informed me that the School of Engineering preferred that I didn't return! From there I went into liberal arts, and then found my way into the School of Education. I suppose that this change was a pretty basic decision in terms of career development. During this same period of time, my sophomore year, I was hired as a Staff Counselor, which is similar to the Resident Assistant position here at Indiana University. It was my experience as a Staff Counselor that primarily helped me to choose to enter the School of Education, and as I continued to work in residence halls, it also lead me to pursue a Master's Degree in Counseling and Guidance. Even after completing my master's work, I had not made up my mind in terms of teaching in public schools or some type of position in higher education. I had interviewed and was offered positions in both fields.

Q. *Were your interviews for positions in student personnel work a result of contacts you made with Deans and supervisors while you were working on your master's degree at the University of Michigan?*

A. No, we did not have the same type of program at Michigan as you folks have here at Indiana University. There weren't any people concerned about placement in the area of Student Affairs. After interviewing for public education, which occurs earlier than the higher education process, I caught a ride to the ACPA convention in Chicago with a supervisor of mine from the residence halls program. This was my first convention. No one had ever told me about these conventions, so for the most part I was quite naive. I hadn't formally registered for the convention or the placement process. Consequently, I wasn't allowed to interview there, but I did take down the relevant information concerning jobs that were attractive to me and Joanne, since we were to be married that same summer. After returning, we both looked through my notes, looking for a position in a warmer region of the country. That is what lead me to apply for a position at the University of Florida. Well, things seemed to be working out there, and they finally contacted me and said they'd like to arrange for a campus visit. I didn't have the money to fly down there and they didn't

have the funds to bring me to Florida -- with that bit of news, our conversation ended. A couple days later they called back and offered to interview me over the phone. For some reason that sounded reasonable to me, we talked for about an hour, and I accepted a position about a week later. The position was comparable to the Coordinators' position here at Indiana University, with responsibility for a residence hall of about 650 students. I spent three years in that role and then decided to go back to school for an advanced degree. At any rate, I'm not recommending this process of career choice and job selection. I, guess sometimes a little intuition and a little luck can compensate for lack of wisdom and maturity. For whatever reasons, joining the University of Florida turned out to be a fine decision which led to a number of lasting friendships.

Q. *When and why did you decide to come to Indiana University?*

A. After completing my doctorate I had taken a position at the University of Georgia. About a year and a half into my experience there, the position at Indiana University was brought to my attention. The main attraction to Indiana, of course, was the fine tradition they have in the area of residence education. I was not only impressed with the tradition, but with the people associated with I.U. as well. I knew I'd be working with a fine group of professionals not only within our Department and in the Division of Student Services, but also in the Departments of College Student Personnel Administration and Higher Education. You can't really get a good feel for the student body through an interview process, so I'd have to say one of the most important reasons for taking the job was the fine colleagues at this institution. It's important to me that there be a professional support group in which a person gets a diversity of opinion, reactions to ideas, and the opportunity to enter into joint projects with others. It's that type of environment that promotes professional growth. I knew Indiana had that to offer. I knew of the tremendous impact that this institution has had on our profession.

Q. *What is the difference between the Dave DeCoster that first arrived at Indiana University and the Dave DeCoster that is preparing to leave?*

A. Probably more mature, less impatient, a little more mellow. Part of that comes with experience in any position and maybe it's just part of getting older. As a younger person, I tended to see a goal in its ideal form and felt a sense of failure unless the goal was realized in its pure form without compromise. But, there is a better chance to become frustrated when you think in those terms. I've become more sensitive to feeling a sense of accomplishment as long as positive movement toward goals is evident.

Q. *Is the Dean of Students position at the University of Nebraska the ultimate height in Student Personnel Administration that you aspire to reach?*

A. I tend not to think in those terms. I understand that at any point in my life there may be a need to rethink some things. Part of the learning experience at the University of Nebraska will be finding out just how much I enjoy administrative functions. I may find that some of the things that excite me the most, while working in student development, may be expanded in these new responsibilities. On the other hand, I might find the opposite to be true -- and then I'll have to adjust.

Q. *What are the typical decisions people pursuing a career in student personnel work make as they develop professionally?*

A. There are three general skill areas in our profession: counseling, teaching, and administrative skills. When we make decisions in terms of position selection, we are really making a decision on skill emphasis. For example, by accepting a Dean of Students position I'm deciding to emphasize administrative skills and responsibilities. This type of decision may be more difficult for young professionals if they have to consider a position that's primarily administrative when they have previously been in a role that emphasized counseling skills and provided maximum opportunities for student relationships. The tendency may be to feel, "well I'm copping out on students; my profession is all about student development and now I'm thinking about a role where those relationships are going to be minimized in favor of some other skills." But if you look at the totality of student development and understand that we need all three types of skills or strategies for a successful program, perhaps career decisions can be made in a somewhat rational manner -- and in a way that allows each of us to seek roles that will best utilize our individual interests and talents.