

ACCOUNTABILITY IN STUDENT PERSONNEL: NECESSARY OR UNNECESSARY?

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Facing the field of college student personnel, as well as higher education in general, is a severe crisis resulting from increasing costs for the educational process and decreasing availability of necessary financial support. In the future it will become necessary for all areas within higher education, administration, faculty and student personnel, to operate within greatly restricted budgets that may necessitate a reduction of available programs and services, in order to remain healthy and functional. Within the field of college student personnel, greater emphasis on accountability and budget justification for funds needed to provide student services and to facilitate student development is bound to remain a major issue in the future. The seventies have adopted the term "accountability" as their watchword and although education has barely begun to internalize the concept, future decades will most surely be guided by accountability and its ramifications. (Morris, 1973)

This emphasis on accountability will place a burden on the field of student personnel, but will also hopefully strengthen it. This apparent contradiction in end results due to changes that must be made reflects the nature of the goals of the profession. Goals to provide an enriching environment for students, to create a sense of community and to increase satisfaction within the academic community, and many others, are rather abstract entities; they are difficult to weigh and measure, which accountability methods demand. Therein lies the burden. By the same token, if the profession evaluates specifically both methods used to attain goals and end results, it will be in a better position to determine the most effective and efficient use of financial resources. In

addition, the future will make it necessary for administrators, student personnel and faculty to work together for the good of their institution and students. No longer will faculty be concerned only with academics and student personnel with student services and development; optimal benefits for all concerned will call for common goals resulting in "contributing to organizational effectiveness." (Shaffer, 1973) All professionals must join forces to benefit their institution as well as respective departments.

Higher education responds, as all societal institutions, to both internal and external pressures. What society deems needed determines what curricula is offered to students and public support indicates how successfully the university is providing for the society that created it. The public has also asserted a concern for the development of student values and character (Mayhew, 1969); around this concern revolves the field of college student personnel. While it is difficult for those concerned with academics to determine if learning has taken place, the measure of student development is even more evasive. The sector of student personnel work that deals mainly with services that are necessary to the functional operation of the institution, such as record-keeping, registration or budgetary tasks, are bound to remain within the system. A different problem faces those areas which provide services and programs to facilitate student growth and to provide aid to students themselves, not the institution alone. Residence hall staff, career counselors, activities directors, etc. may have to respond to the challenge of defunding their contribution to the institution when a lack of financial resources becomes critical. The move towards accountability will force all areas of student personnel to conscientiously plan concrete budgets, objectives and goals and also to defend the profession's philosophical reason for existence. Students need more than academics to facilitate growth; "student development is not

merely complementary or supplementary to the instructional program, it is a critical teaching function of the college." (Crookston, 1972)

The need for change in educational institutions and in college student personnel is evident and is beginning to take place. At present, there exists a dichotomy dividing those concerned with education into two opposing groups. Some say that the theories of business management cannot be successfully applied to education whose end product is person-oriented and not product-oriented. Many in student personnel believe that basic assumptions and goals associated with student development cannot be discussed within a bureaucratic system of organization. (Crookston, 1972) Others state that the only principles of management techniques that student personnel ever utilized was the delegation of responsibility and deciding who would do what and when. (Boylan, 1973) Certain principles of management can be applied to student personnel to correct what Boylan states as the major problem in the professions: failure of student personnel organizations to pull together in an effort to meet common goals. Because of a demand for a wider spectrum of services, those in student personnel have a much more diversified group of functions now than in the past. (Boylan, 1973) When an increase in specialization takes place, it is beneficial for certain principles of business management to be applied to insure clarification of goals and to provide optimal opportunity for all parts of an organization to relate effectively to the whole. Experts in management believe that education must respond to rapid societal change and increasing complexity as opposed to remaining behind the times or stagnant in methods.

Accountability is a vague and nebulous term open to loose interpretation. It is not within the scope of this paper to present a thorough analysis of the myriad of ways in which accountability and business managerial techniques can be

applied to college student personnel. However, in order to support the thesis that both of the above concepts will play an increasingly important role in student personnel work in the future, it is necessary to define accountability, look at implementations in organizational structure that are suggested, and discuss a few management principles already successfully implemented within the profession.

Many definitions of accountability have been offered for those in the field of education and student personnel. Hartnett states:

We define accountability as an agreement upon objectives; decisions related to the input committed to the achievement of the objectives; and the measure of both process and output to see the degree to which objectives have been met. This definition has operational utility for objectives can be agreed upon and set for the educational institution and its component parts. (p. 1, 1971)

This definition stresses planning methods and the evaluation of outcome of stated objectives. This makes it clear that the first step for student personnel is to examine methods of implementation of new programs, and to set realistic goals and objectives. Evaluation becomes easier once objectives of basic planning are set and completed. Harpel states that accountability as a concept has remained based in theory and is idealistic, but the benefits are as follows:

a new sense of direction and purpose; valuable feedback on results becomes available. The unmet needs of both staff and consumers can be identified; underutilized resources can be redeployed for better results; more external recognition and visibility can be gained and often

increased financial support can result. Even though the current accountability movement appears to be externally imposed upon the Student Personnel Profession, there is no reason why the response cannot be healthy from an organizational standpoint. (pp. 144-45, 1975)

Kenneth P. Mortimer believes that the difficulty and confusion educators exhibit when attempting to implement accountability methods stems from a basic misunderstanding of the definition of the term. He lists three types of accountability: managerial, accountability in evaluation and accountability versus responsibility (Mortimer, 1972). He discusses the first type within a slightly different framework from educators by stating that control is one of the functions of management in almost any organization. (Mortimer, 1972) Still speaking to organizational accountability, he quotes from a study to state that "the optimum control situation for organizational accountability is one in which rewards and sanctions are distributed so that those whose performance deviates from the plan will be punished (Mortimer, 1972). This type of rigidity could certainly cause anyone associated with education to feel uncomfortable and dubious over the purpose of accountability. However, there are two methods by which to interpret the best way to enforce accountability of administrators in public administration: the legal view and the constitutional view. (Mortimer, 1972)

[Legalists tend] to advocate accountability which is clearly defined as to both its content and the means and routes by which it can be enforced...leads to a very clear chain of command and performance of accountability through two channels only: first, the courts and disciplinary control of departments; and second, the authority exercised over public servants by ministers

who are accountable to a representative assembly. (Mortimer, p. 4, 1972)

This refers back to the two types of external and internal pressures for accountability in student personnel cited by Harpel, but the constitutional interpretation seems to follow more closely the ideals of education. The above definition does not take into account that in education there is often a lack of one chain of command; often there are several. "The constitutional view recognizes that duly elected representatives of the people are often in conflict over what is in the public interest and that administrators clearly exercise a good deal of discretion in interpreting the laws." (Mortimer, 1972) Discretion is also used by those in education when interpreting internal decisions made within the institution as well as public external decisions.

Another confusion in education surrounds the two concepts of evaluation and accountability; they are not entirely one and the same thing. Accountability versus responsibility is a particularly important area of concern for higher education and student personnel. Neff proposes the following distinction between the two terms: responsibility should only be used in reference to the voluntary assumption of an obligation, while accountability should be used in reference to legal liability directed to the performance or lack of performance of certain acts or duties. (Mortimer, p. 8, 1972) The question of whether or not the student personnel profession undertakes the goal of developing student character and values becomes important in terms of responsibility. Determining if this goal is accountable, or if it should be characterized as voluntary responsibility, is a viable area for the profession to examine.

At present, many institutions of higher education, and student personnel departments within them, have introduced managerial principles and accountability methods in order to increase efficiency.

Because large groups of people in education must work together in an organized way to maximize efficiency, the following are offered as guidelines for functioning as an organized whole.

1. Those involved need to know what is expected of them and have some feedback as to how well they are meeting expectations.
2. They need to clearly understand the criteria by which their performance will be judged.
3. Also, they have to be involved in the process of establishing institutional goals. (Boylan, p. 323, 1973)

These basic principles can be utilized by student personnel workers beginning to develop methods of accountability. By knowing expectations and criteria for evaluation for their respective job functions, it then will become easier to transfer some of these principles to individual programs in order to determine output in terms of student benefits.

A fresh approach to the idea of planning via establishing objectives is offered by J. Gordon Parr. In discussing planning approaches he states that the first is to muddle along. (1973) This accusation has been directed toward those in education and the accountability movement leaves no room for haphazard planning. The second is "to set fixed objectives and to stride resolutely to them." (Parr, 1973) For those in a profession that deals with human beings and environments it is highly improbable that objectives that allow for no room for flexibility will accomplish desired ends; it is even likely that they might produce detrimental results. The third type is planning with the idea in mind that objectives "move" or need to be modified as implementation is taking place. (Parr, 1973) This idea is significant in two ways. Those in student personnel have to be sensitive to the

dynamics of human personality and an environment that is often in a state of flux. What may pave the way for development within a certain student or group of students may not be successful for another individual or group. In order to modify objectives, flexibility needs to be kept in mind when planning. In addition, resources may be withdrawn or added, once again calling for flexibility in order to change objectives.

Not all professionals in student personnel embrace the current accountability movement or the method of management by objectives wholeheartedly. They voice the fear that in attempting to become accountable through managerial techniques, the profession will become dehumanized and insensitive to the needs of those for whom it exists. There is a basic philosophical difference between those in educational fields and those in traditional business; people cannot be treated in the same manner as out-puts of an assembly line or the recognition of every person's individuality will be lost. The move towards a system where planning, goal setting, definition of objectives and quantitative evaluation becomes the primary concern will destroy the humanistic concern of those in student personnel. Managerial planning and accountability, in the strict sense of the word where objectives are relentlessly pursued and evaluated, is inconsistent to the goals of the profession which has its special strength in guiding, counseling and striving towards helping students grow and mature. Sauerman and Nash are among those in the profession who believe that student personnel cannot function effectively within the strict boundaries of management by objectives. Student personnel work is not value-free; herein lies the conflict with those who advocate management by objectives. They believe that

student development professionals will have to find ways to empower students. Rollo May has suggested that we help students to

understand that they truly count for something by getting them to realize and enhance their own personal power. This will necessitate our encouraging them to cultivate intimate personal relationships; to plan and effectuate decisions; to develop personal-professional competencies...to create sustaining themes which gives their lives social, political and spiritual power and hope, and to influence, in tangible ways, their daily educational activities. If student development is ever to take its rightful place in the academy, it will have to adopt an "empowering model for personal development and institutional renewal." (p. 183, 1975)

This statement speaks directly to the goals endorsed by student personnel professionals, but Nash and Sauerma do not offer an alternative method of accountability to those already developed by managerial theorists. It is my premise that accountability is an issue that education will have to come to terms with, be it externally imposed by public demand to account for expenditures or internally imposed within the institution. The fear that student personnel will lose its humanity in the face of accountability is a very real issue for the profession to examine. At present, the only accountability tools available for student personnel to utilize are those that have been developed outside the educational professions. Currently, there appears to be no effective way to evaluate and measure the component parts of student development, but perhaps in the future new methods will be formulated for use in professions that work with persons rather than quantitative objects. Management by objectives can be and has been successfully incorporated by those in student personnel to effectively organize departments and to account for budgetary expenditures. The future will determine if methods will be developed

to measure more directly the output of student personnel work, student development in all senses of the term.

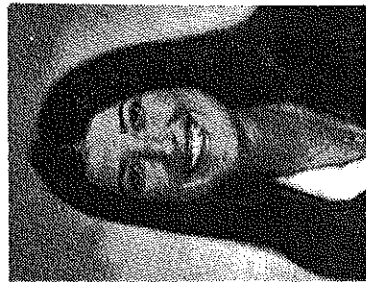
As has been shown, the current consumer movement and demand for accountability has had a widely spread effect upon all areas of education, including college student personnel. I believe that one of the most important ramifications of this is that all those concerned with the total educational process will have to deal with accountability as a cohesive institutional whole, rather than from one departmental vantage point. Burns Crookston proposes that "certain basic competencies should be developed by all members of the academic community." (1975) All areas would have a functional expertise; those in academics should concentrate on instruction, those in student personnel on consultation and those in administration on milieu management. (Crookston, 1975) All would have a working knowledge of the areas other than their own speciality. If all sectors thoroughly understand these competencies a more cohesive institutional statement of purpose could be developed. Accountability methods would be far easier to develop for the total academic system if educational goals and objectives were formulated for the institution as a whole. In order for higher education to remain functioning at a high level of efficiency in the future when accountability will play a very important role, one of the foremost and necessary prerequisites will involve all the various components to join forces for the good of the institution as a whole.

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