

Student Growth in a Student Personnel Environment

by JILDA DIGIOVACCHINO

Having only cracked the door in the field of CSPA, there is a multitude of stimuli that is bombarding me with a variety of innovative thoughts concerning the different Student Personnel Areas. There seems to be an underlying theme which is jumping out of every paragraph, journal and text, and that underlying theme is development of student growth. The question remains, is it possible to encourage development of students in the field of personnel administration. Immediately, when hearing personnel administration, I can visualize a man at a paper stacked desk, nose to letter, pencil working arduously, with phones ringing, and fans roaring, and temperatures soaring—from human tempers to common humidity. Appropriately, I will interject at this time a line by Edith Wharton, which will hopefully put a balance to "the man at a desk." I feel these lines will portray how development can take place in the noisy syndrome of the necessary and at times frustrating paper race. "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." This raises questions such as: where is our place in student development; how do we educate, encourage, individual development in a world, a culture, a minority, an establishment that is constantly changing? The answers to the effectiveness of the previous questions lies in the individual who chooses to carry the candle and how strong a modeling agent can be to mirror that wisdom. The succeeding paragraphs will deal with the importance of seeing the individual as a unique being which will determine the credibility of the candle bearer in Student Personnel.

Being a student of life and a student of education, I feel an identification with Williamson's and Biggs' book on Student Personnel Work. So often, I found it reinforcing my ideas dealing with looking at an individual as a unique person, learning to step to the beat of his own drums. This is the first area of study, Student Personnel, besides Humanistic Psychology, which I find the field saying, consider all the facets of an individual before focusing on the jewel.

From my psychology background, my philosophy is that models are the greatest teachers. To quote my last graduate psychology professor, "Jesus was one of the

greatest psychiatrists and models the world has ever seen." And that is what education should be, and at times guilty of not being; that is, the model, the door opener, the compass filled with degrees, with direction, but not with the exact routes to venture. A tunnel will take you in one direction to meet a destination; a freeway, will give you many directions to that destination so that a bottleneck, clogging, stagnating situation is traded for a smooth flow of traffic. So the institution must provide for these free ways, dealing with academic, spiritual, social, emotional, and physical needs. It is not enough to look at an institution, who can state, yes these needs are shown in our objectives in our college catalog, check page four. The implementation of these needs are the agents which allow us to judge whether this educational system is successful as a model. How are these services meeting the commuter and resident students, are they aware the services exist? Is the institution moving with changing times?

Both institution and student are faced with a constant revolution. The institution is faced with changing attitudes, changing mores, tradition, economic stability and instability, and innovative ideas, which are constantly challenging institutions from year to year, generation to generation. The student also becomes a part of the institution's challenges. The student comes to college, often faced with three questions, who am I, where am I going, why am I here, whose answers are constantly re-evaluated and changing in one's search for identity and search for self. The student challenges institutional policy, the institution's response to the challenge will either make way for improvement or disappointment to either group. In either direction, the educational "model" is asserting its role, still mirroring light.

Again, what is important to the individual student? I feel individualism is important, important to be developed with the necessary freedom which goes along with that development. The question, how much freedom is enough, will never be answered or scaled on a population basis, for that freedom can only be weighed on an individual scale, which gives the individual freedom to choose to make his own decisions. So is this implying, anything goes, hopefully educators will disagree, I as a resident assistant, with

two and a half years previous experience and starting my first year here at I.U. will bluntly say no.

I see my role and educators' roles as being one that is to guide, but not direct. Life is a day by day learning experience. No situation, good or bad, is beneficial unless the question, what did I learn from that experience can be answered. If this awareness cannot be beneficially used for future experiences then the School of Hard Knocks will become a daily part of our individual lives. So in our choosing process of experiences, we involve ourselves with many extremes, but I feel the middle road, the balance, must be found in our own lives. Whether experiences are good or bad, as long as an individual's growth in this direction or any direction, is not infringing upon the rights of individuals in his environment, and being able to take from any experience that which is beneficial to one's personal



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growth, then half the battle of life and development has been won.

People that are in the field of student personnel play an important role in this development. A lot of student growth depends on the environment Student Personnel Workers have available to their students on campus. What is important is to acknowledge that personnel workers are human beings, capable of wise and unwise actions. What is important for a staff is to make itself available and visible to students, as well as, to help them understand what their job is in making their way a little easier. Without this communication between student and student personnel workers, then there is no need for a staff, for there will be no candle burning and no light to be mirrored. Hopefully, at the end of academic life, one won't feel as though he is a package being stamped, "O.K. inspected by No. 44," but rather see education in his own light.