

Student Affairs: A Conscience for the Campus

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*CONSCIENCE (noun) 1a: the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good b: a faculty, power, or principle enjoining good acts c: the part of the superego in psychoanalysis that transmits commands and admonitions to the ego 2: conformity to the dictates of the conscience 3: sensitive regard for fairness or justice.

*selected definitions from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (p. 238). Springfield, MA: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1980.

Student Affairs is an integral element of the administrative structure of colleges and universities across the United States. Student Affairs professionals make a daily difference in the campus environment and student life by providing the services and educationally enriching programs that help students succeed. Since the early days of our profession, great emphasis has been placed upon the total development of our students' minds, bodies, and characters through systematic intervention (Young, 1993). We believe that students should assume full responsibility for their actions and decisions, and we know that they require adequate information and resources to develop fully both in and out of the classroom.

As Student Affairs staff, we must also respect the faculty, administrators, and students with whom we work (Kuh & Schuh, 1991). Our role in educating the campus should capitalize on all of our skills as leaders and teachers as we work to facilitate a healthy environment for the entire campus. But the role of Student Affairs professionals should be much more than that; we must be willing to assume the role of "conscience" to the campus. Such a conscience is needed to maintain a sense of what is right while monitoring campus commitment to fairness in the administration of college activities--both curricular and extracurricular.

It is our responsibility, as part of the "superego" of higher education, to figuratively sit on the shoulders of our campuses. In so doing we can educate students, faculty, staff, and other constituencies vital to our schools about the importance of integrity and ethics--and that values are intrinsic in the daily operations of an institution.

Student Affairs professionals can serve as a conscience by utilizing a series of reminders that reflect the nature and values of Student Affairs work.

1. Remind the campus community that students are in college to learn and develop personally as well as academically. Student Affairs professionals believe that each student is unique and that each person has worth and dignity.

We want the entire campus to accept these principles as the basis for our existence (NASPA, 1987).

2. Remind students that they will gain the most from the college experience if they are truly involved in the entire educational process, both in and out of the classroom. At work and at play, students must take responsibility for their own decisions and actions while they take risks and learn new skills. The amount of student learning and personal development achieved is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement (Astin, 1993).

3. Remind the campus community about the importance of cultural diversity in a campus environment. At the same time, a diverse, pluralistic college needs to be carefully managed in order to function well and to succeed (Kuh & Schuh, 1991). Students learn and benefit from interaction with others who have different ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds.

4. Remind faculty that they are role models in all that they do and say. How a student is treated in the classroom, in advising conferences, and in informal campus settings all influence how the student feels about a course, a department, and the institution as a whole.

5. Remind students that all of their college experiences are in the "real world." Contrary to the popular saying "what I'll do when I get out into the real world," all that occurs while in college is indeed "real." Students should be encouraged to take their higher education opportunities very seriously.

6. Remind the campus community that integrity and ethics are significant issues, and that expectations for behavior should be clearly stated. If inappropriate behavior occurs, all members of the campus community are obligated to handle the follow-up processes fairly and consistently.

7. Remind the campus community that health concerns are important, and that health and wellness education starts with awareness of current issues and guidelines for healthy lifestyles. Student recreational activities, for instance, provide opportunities to build teamwork and self-confidence, and to relieve the stresses experienced in an academic setting.

8. Remind campus planning units that while they are dealing with increasingly stringent financial times, they need to maintain quality resources, programs and services for students and the campus environment. The challenge lies in being fiscally prudent.

9. Remind the campus decision makers that all decisions, whether they involve a new faculty member, a building renovation project, an academic program that might be discontinued, or additions to the current fee structure, impact students.

Once we have assumed our role as conscience to the campus, we must strive to resolve problems and issues as they arise. Only through complete involvement and commitment can we succeed at what we seek--a campus environment where students can achieve their personal and academic goals. We must volunteer for the committees, boards, and task forces that do much of the background work of any institution. We need to conduct ourselves in a genuinely collegial manner with our co-workers from academic affairs, the

physical plant operations, the development office, the finance and administrative division, and the President's office.

Student Affairs professionals should work with these and other campus constituents to develop campus policies and procedures. By forming alliances, developing coalitions, building networks, role modeling, developing intentional collegial contacts across the campus, and participating in campus and community events, our voices can be heard.

1. Form alliances. Alliances are formed when parties interested in a particular topic come together to work toward a solution. Student Affairs is a partner on the campus team, and we can facilitate the development of alliances that transcend departmental and divisional boundaries.

2. Develop coalitions. Coalitions of existing interest groups or organizations may seek solutions to a common problem or issue by utilizing their shared resources.

3. Build networks. Networks involve individuals with similar interests or characteristics who are supportive of one another and pool their information and skills.

4. Support role models. An individual who has achieved the goal toward which a student is striving is an important role model. Becoming acquainted with one's role models can provide a vital support system within the institutional setting.

5. Develop intentional contacts. Faculty and staff often do not fully understand the nature of student personnel work. At the same time, as Student Affairs professionals, we may not understand the multiple expectations placed upon faculty, such as teaching, research, and service. Student Affairs staff should identify opportunities that encourage faculty involvement with selected aspects of our work. Faculty can serve on advisory boards to Student Affairs programs, work on student recognition programs, or co-present programs in living groups.

6. Participate in campus and community events. Each campus and community has a wealth of events taking place on a daily basis. Student Affairs workers have countless opportunities to participate in activities not directly related to our positions: attending a basketball game, playing in the community orchestra, or working with a service organization. By remaining involved we help others in our communities to know us and our personal talents and interests better. We also allow ourselves to learn more about our communities.

A Student Affairs professional's work is never done. Our plates are always full. There's always the next student to see, the next meeting to attend, and the next report to complete. But we have an obligation to be leaders in our higher education communities and to remind the campus that students are the people we serve. It is our role and our obligation to be a conscience for the campus in these ways and in these times.

References

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