

Valuing Professional Preparation in Student Affairs: An American Perspective

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Graduate programs to train persons to work in student services is unique to American higher education. Professional preparation emerged formally in the early 20th century. The background and need for this type of academic program became apparent as recognition of out of classroom functions on college and university campuses gained importance. A hallmark of American higher education has included being concerned about "the whole person." The role of student services in the United States was expressed first in the pamphlet "The Student Personnel Point of View" published by the American Council on Education in 1937 and revised in 1949. This document has continued to provide a basic and fundamental foundation for professional practitioners in student affairs today.

BACKGROUND

American higher education, during its first two hundred years of history was male dominated. The earliest universities in the United States were private and secular. Well known early institutions such as Harvard University followed the British model of higher education. The educational emphasis impacting students at that time was intellectual as well as spiritual and moral development. Student housing, discipline, and advising were handled by the male faculty. However, in the early 19th century this changed. In 1837, Ohio's Oberlin College opened its doors to four women. This event was pivotal. Concerns extending beyond intellect, spiritual and moral development emerged, in part, as a result of this historic event. With the presence of women on the campus, concerns extended beyond focusing strictly on what was happening in the classroom. Coeducation triggered discussions about supervision of men and women together and development of services and programs to help students deal with life outside the classroom. Titles such as wardens, matrons and lady principals appeared. These titles eventually evolved into such names as deans of men and women, dean of students, and vice president for student affairs.

NECESSITY FOR TRAINING

The focus of these early positions extended beyond the classroom and involved concern for social life, health of students, curriculum advisement and the provision of suitable living quarters for students. These functional areas look familiar today even as we approach the 21st century. At Harvard, President Eliot appointed two types of deans, one whose duties were primarily academic and the other whose duties were responsible for student discipline. In 1891, LeBaron Russell Briggs, generally regarded as the first Dean of Students, was appointed by President Eliot, to assume responsibilities related to the activities outside of the classroom such as student discipline, and registration and records. Briggs held this position at Harvard until his retirement in 1925.

The numbers of women assuming significant roles in higher education increased with the advent of coeducation. One of the early deans of women, Marion Talbot from the University of Chicago, invited colleagues in similar roles to attend a conference in 1903. Anne Dudley Blitz, in 1913, was one of the first students to seek academic preparation for the dean of women position. Later Blitz became the dean of women at the University of Minnesota, a position she held for 30 years. In 1915, a book written by Lois Matthews, "The Dean of Women" was the first to specifically address the work of a dean. Mrs. Matthews was the Dean of Women at the University of Wisconsin.

In 1914-15 the Columbia University Teachers College offered a professional diploma entitled the "Dean of Women in Colleges and Normal Schools. This program was the earliest example of a formalized professional preparation program in student affairs. The curricula may have been different in the early years, however, the rationale for these programs has remained consistent. During this same time frame other preparation programs emerged including:

- * Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York
- * Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana
- * Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
- * Penn State University, College Station, Pennsylvania
- * Michigan State University, Lansing, Michigan

These programs offered Masters degrees in student personnel. All of these early programs expanded to offer doctoral degrees in higher education with emphasis in student affairs. In the 1960's many new programs emerged across the United States. The 1990's have seen student affairs graduate programs focus not only on student service delivery, but also on specific critical issues such as adult learners, educational leadership, and higher education law. Graduates increasingly are being called on to be "experts" in a variety of student areas, not just the "traditional" student affairs programs of 25 years ago.

VALUE OF PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

The value placed on professional preparation was initially manifested and reinforced through the early informal gatherings of practitioners engaged in student development functions. The early deans of men and deans of women met separately to discuss and to exchange ideas and concerns. As these professional gatherings became more frequent, the groups became more formally organized. These early meetings gave birth to many of the professional associations that are recognized today. As early as 1916 the deans of women organized the National Association for Deans of Women (NADW) which today is known as the National Association of Women in Education (NAWE.) The National Association of Deans of Men is the forerunner of the current organization known as National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA.)

Professional training emerged for some of the same reasons that the early student personnel practitioners had a need to gather. The informal discussions provided a forum for sharing common issues and expressing concerns related to the students with whom they were engaged. In addition, the content of these discussions included the roles that they as student personnel practitioners played on their campuses and with their students. The issues that arose, the sharing of ideas and some of the problem solving outcomes provided a basic framework from which the profession began to emerge. The need evolved for the student personnel practitioners to identify common purposes when interacting with their colleagues and in working with students. Defining relationships with the faculty and administration on their campuses was another important area.

In most academic disciplines, engaging in problem solving relies on theory as well as a body of literature to provide guidance and a rationale for reaching workable solutions. Student Personnel is no exception. Student's needs are not limited to the classroom. On residential campuses students spend more time engaged in out-of-classroom activities. Research studies show that the out-of-classroom experience contributes significantly to the total education of the student. For these reasons, academic preparation is an important criteria for practitioners engaged in the student affairs functions at the university.

Professional preparation provides the necessary background about the university as well as about the student. Organizational and student development theories begin to take the guess work out of planning and responding. Applying theory to practice is at the heart of a solid preparation program.

PROFILE OF A PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION PROGRAM

Professional preparation programs at the master's level most generally require two years of study. Candidates for the master's program must have earned a baccalaureate degree, demonstrate potential for graduate study, and meet the academic requirements of the graduate school. Students accepted into a preparation program usually receive an appointment for an internship in one of the settings approved to provide the experiential learning aspect of the program. These sites may include housing, student activities, international programs, academic advising, multicultural affairs and career planning and placement. An important characteristic of an outstanding preparation program is provision of a solid theoretical foundation through coursework linked with an internship (and supervisor) to provide "hands-on" opportunities and experiences. Internships usually provide the candidate with a stipend and full tuition scholarship.

Numerous professional preparation programs have emerged across the United States since the 1960's. As a result, the Council for the Advancement of Standards has developed guidelines for student affairs programs and the preparation of practitioners at the master's level. All programs must include three components:

Foundation Studies - This area must include the historical, psychological, cultural, sociological and research foundations of higher education. The history and philosophy of student affairs is an essential component of this standard.

Professional Studies - This area must include studies of basic knowledge for practice. All programs must include five related areas of study:

- * Student Development Theory
- * Student Characteristics and Effects of College on Students
- * Individual, Group and Organizational Interventions
- * Organization and Administration of Student Affairs
- * Assessment, Evaluation and Research.

Supervised Practice - This area includes practica and internships. Practical experiences should include work with individual students; program planning implementation and evaluation; staff training and supervision; and administrative functions and processes.

The core of required coursework that is typically part of a preparation program to meet these standards includes:

- * history, philosophy, and functions of student affairs work
- * theory and assessment of college student development and educational environments
- * educational outcomes of American colleges and universities

- * a capstone seminar to integrate core curriculum and practitioner experiences and to prepare students for their transitions to professional positions
- * statistics in education
- * research in education

CONCLUSION

In the United States, professional preparation is viewed as an important criteria for advancement in the field of student affairs. Today, as in the formative years of the profession, professional associations through publications and annual conferences have fostered the latest advances in the field. Job placement centers at the conferences promote and perpetuate the linking of qualified candidates for positions in the field with potential employers. All of these activities contribute to the networking that has become a significant aspect of these annual meetings. The rationale that existed in the early years of the profession exists today. The importance of professional preparation for practitioners grew as the proliferation of student affairs functions expanded on colleges and university campuses. The value placed on professional preparation for student affairs practitioners involves having well trained staff to carry out student affairs functions. This value, most importantly, reflects the important role these services play in American higher education.

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