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Community is one of the most essential values of our profession and should be developed campuswide among faculty, students, and student affairs colleagues.

Community: The Value of Social Synergy

Dennis C. Roberts

This chapter identifies one of the values of our profession that many in the field may not initially recognize as a value. The creation of community is so important and so obvious to us that we might take it for granted.

The approach in this chapter is to look at the historical roots of the student affairs profession for insight about the value of community. These historical roots provide the beginnings of our definition of the concept. Other contemporary definitions of community are provided that refine this initial definition. For example, Schlossberg's (1989) concepts of marginality and mattering embellish our understanding of the term. Next, the chapter explores how traditions and artifacts influence community and how community can be created among faculty, using Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates' (1991) model of the "involving college." Then the discussion moves to the challenge of creating community through diversity. Finally, the chapter returns to the student affairs profession and the philosophy on which it was founded. Expansion of campuswide acceptance of the obligations of that philosophy is essential if community is to be developed on our campuses.

Beginnings of Community as a Professional Value

In her 1987 interview commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (Roberts, 1988), Esther Lloyd Jones was asked to identify the essential values of student personnel work. Her first response was, "community, unquestionably." The statement was so direct, so simple, and so immediate that it was startling.

The value of community is elusive in many ways because educators, as

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well as others, have difficulty grasping the concept. In Lloyd-Jones's (1989, pp. 2-3) opinion, "The condition of community is the binding together of individuals toward a common cause or experience. Individuals both enlarge and restrict their freedoms by joining such a community. But whatever restriction results is far surpassed by the individual's and the group's ability to achieve established goals while at the same time creating mutual support and pride."

This definition is historical and contemporary. Among Lloyd-Jones's contributions in drafting *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, [1937] 1986) was the assertion that student personnel work could only be fulfilled when concerted attention was focused on the environment and the power of students, faculty, and staff working alongside each other in a community setting.

Community as Espoused in *The Student Personnel Point of View*

One of the primary reasons for convening the American Council on Education (ACE) Student Personnel Committee in 1937 was to study and then propose an appropriate way to deal with the emerging role of deans on college campuses of that day. The emergence of these deans coincided with greater pressures on faculty to conduct research and expand the knowledge base of their disciplines; the role of dean had been implemented on a number of campuses to fulfill the duties that faculty members had previously performed outside the traditional classroom.

As Young (this volume, Chapter One) has indicated, a great deal of attention was given to the importance and uniqueness of the individual in *The Student Personnel Point of View*. This focus on the individual was complemented by attention to the environment, but it is clear that most of the references are to the individual and not to the collective community. There may be a variety of reasons why this happened. One likely reason is that community is essentially a feminist concept. When one looks at how *The Student Personnel Point of View* came to be, it is a tribute to Lloyd-Jones, a woman serving on an all-male ACE committee, that the value of community is included at all, let alone espoused prominently.

The feminist values of connecting, working together, and creating a shared reality were evident to Lloyd-Jones when she studied at Columbia University in the late 1920s. She observed faculty and students integrating the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and theology in ways that illuminated the importance of the environment as it impacted the individual. This experience caused Lloyd-Jones to permanently see the campus in a different way from most of the others around her. The newness of Freudian psychology in America had captured the imagination of many intellectuals, leading them

to concentrate on the importance of the individual and an individual's well-being and development. However, Lloyd-Jones asserted that equal value should be placed on the interaction of the individual and the environment.

Education and the development of human potential is achieved by attending to the individual, as a whole, within a community. Community is the connection, the support, and the focus of attention that make it possible for the individual to take risks in the education process.

Other Conceptualizations of Community

Because community is so broad and difficult to define, it may be helpful to review two other definitions of community. Boyer (1990) sought to define community by identifying key attributes of a true campus community: (1) educationally *purposeful*; (2) *open*, that is, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed; (3) *just*, that is, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued; (4) *disciplined*, that is, a place where individuals accepted their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good; (5) *caring*, that is, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged; and (6) *celebrative*, that is, a place where the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared. Peck (1987) described a community as both a process and place. Community is something that emerges through the process of interaction, but it is also a place where the individuals comprising the community can communicate honestly with each other, where their relationships are authentic and intimate, and where the members are committed to sharing their joys and their sorrows.

These formulations of community help to expand and enhance the conceptualization of community. They are not really different from the definition provided by Lloyd-Jones (1989); these other definitions simply embellish different perspectives on the same phenomenon. Indeed, the ideas of Lloyd-Jones, Boyer, and Peck can be combined to form a list of essential elements required to establish community:

- Common values and resulting purpose
- Psychic as well as practical collaboration
- Connecting, supporting, and affirming
- Openness to question and challenge that respectfully seeks new understanding
- Voluntary modification of personal freedoms so that a greater collective good can be achieved
- Fulfillment of others' and the community's aspirations.

Institutional Evidence of Community

Seldom can a college or university mission statement be found that does not put forth the "creation of a community of scholars" as a major institutional goal. The words are so frequently used that they really have no purpose in differentiating one institution from another, nor do these words usually compel a college or university to provide explicit programs directed at creating community.

Is community to be found in the winning football team? Is it to be found in a faculty member or student receiving a distinguished award or fellowship? Has a college achieved community when it is selected for listing in a national publication describing the nation's top ten bargains in academe? Is community found among student groups who pursue a common academic, service, social, or other aim? Is community found in the aftermath of a campus tragedy or crisis?

The answer to any of these questions is likely to vary. And it should vary depending on how campus students, faculty, and staff relate to any specific happening. What the examples mentioned above have in common is the potential to draw members of the community together for a transcending purpose. These unifying purposes may include celebration, mourning, honoring, or even a focus on creating community.

What makes community such a compelling phenomenon is that, in achieving a goal, both the individual and the organization are benefited beyond what could have been achieved independently of each other. This is social synergy, or what Young and Elfrink (1991) have called the "mutual empowerment" of community.

Social synergy, the adhesive that binds individuals together in community, can be further illustrated through the use of Schlossberg's (1989) concept of *matting*, which is actually a continuum of *matting* to *marginality*. *Marginality* is a feeling of being "out of things," the nagging question of whether or not one belongs. *Marginality* is a temporary position of passage into or out of an organization; or it maybe a more or less permanent condition that results from the community excluding the person for reason of back- ground, appearance, commitment, or other arbitrary factor. *Matting* is a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an extension of themselves. *Matting* is conveyed through (1) *attention*, or our command of another person's interest or notice; (2) *importance*, or the belief that another person cares about what we think and do or is concerned about our fate; (3) *ego extension*, or the feeling that another person is proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures; (4) *dependence*, or the feeling that someone else counts on us; and (5) *appreciation*, or receipt of acknowledgment or reinforcement for our contribution.

Artifacts of Community

The evidence that leads individuals to believe that they do or do not matter is powerfully conveyed through a community's traditions, rituals, and other cultural artifacts. In essence, these artifacts declare what the community is and define which of us do or do not matter to the community. Some traditions on a college campus may be explicit, and many others may be implicit or hidden. Student personnel staff and faculty can impact either the explicit or implicit traditions, but, at minimum, the explicit traditions of the institution should send messages that draw others into the community rather than exclude them. Traditions give either inclusive, community-enhancing messages about the matting of individuals, or they give exclusive, differentiating messages that make certain people marginal.

Physical locations can give powerful, symbolic messages to new members of a college or university community. Is there a place where all members of the campus can join together? Is there a space where people can casually walk, sit, or converse with one another? Many campuses have a mall or a dell. Others have sidewalks that cross paths. The actual physical locations are important, but more important is what the campus members make of these locations. For example, at Lynchburg College, the sidewalks of the campus intersect at the Fellowship Circle, which has a medallion imbedded in the center, commemorating the founding of the Virginia Conference of Christians and Jews at the college during a time when discrimination and exclusion frequently prevailed in the larger community. The Fellowship Circle, thereby, is a place that joins people of different backgrounds and experiences, and it is assumed that all have something unique and important to offer. Similarly, the heart of the campus of Grinnell College is a central site where students, faculty, and staff go to express political or social concerns; if enough people join hands together around this site to make a full circle, the demonstration is considered successful.

The essence of these physical examples is that they reflect the value that all students, faculty, and staff are important. This value is inclusiveness. There are a number of other values that can be reflected in campus activities or organizations. One of the heavily debated issues on many college campuses today is that of hate speech policies versus freedom of speech. In this debate, we see the value of inclusion juxtaposed against one of the most fundamental of democratic freedoms—speaking one's own mind. Another emerging issue is concern over violence and aggression on college campuses. The value explored here is the opportunity or right of students to pursue education without the encroachment of incivility and physical threat. And, finally, the political correctness debate concerns the desire of many institutions to create more hospitable environments for a broader diversity of students. Can hospitable environments for people of diverse backgrounds be

established in contexts where only partial knowledge of a diverse range of cultures and worldviews is reflected in the curriculum?

Convocations and commencements are important campus gatherings where the values of a college or university are frequently most visible. The symbolic objects, regalia, special music, and communal sayings provide an opportunity to explicitly remind the community members of the campus heritage. Likewise, new campus members are introduced to these symbols in a way that frequently makes an indelible impression. Convocations and commencements are made all the more powerful because they are usually timed at important points of passage for members of the community. An opening convocation for new students marks one of the most impressionable moments of those connected with a student's four years of college. Parents and family may join their sons, daughters, spouses, and other relatives for a Convocation marking the successful completion of the beginning weeks or months of study at college.

It is important that ceremonies or rituals be carefully designed to send inclusive messages to all participants. Insensitivity may allow speakers to inappropriately focus on traditional age, dependent, first-year students, which has the inadvertent effect of excluding transfer students or adult students with spouses and families. The people who are visible at such ceremonial events comprise another important factor; the leaders who are chosen to make remarks at these occasions ideally will represent the broad membership of the campus community or will even more broadly reflect its goals of diversity.

The rite of passage for traditional age students receives a heavy focus at many institutions, but little ritual in passage of adult students is provided. Yes, the addressing of traditional student transitions is probably easier, but just because some students are older does not mean that their passages are any less important or less difficult. If at all possible, events designed to acknowledge the passage experiences of nontraditional adults should be initiated, even if they are only as simple as providing a meeting time during which various types of students are given the opportunity to express what they are experiencing and feeling.

Tradition and ritual can be modified; a campus need not maintain events or places that are destructive to the sense of an inclusive campus community. For example, a campus could establish a faculty, staff, and student task force on traditions, charged to review institutionally explicit and implicit values. Once the values are determined, a process of interviewing and surveying campus members about the events or places that, in their eyes, are traditions could be undertaken. Once these rituals and traditions are identified, the task force could then work to enhance the inclusive traditions and cease to acknowledge or publicly celebrate the exclusive traditions. Imbedded traditions do not die easily; a frontal attack on some campus traditions may fail.

The more effective strategy is simply to ignore these traditions until they cease to exist.

Establishing Community with Faculty

A frequent problem in contemporary times is that the ideal of community may not appear to be highly valued by faculty. This seeming indifference is partially the result of the inherent or acquired skepticism of the life of an intellectual. The self-selection and training of faculty encourage an attitude of questioning and staunch independence that is necessary for the critical analysis of research and theory. However, this proclivity toward skepticism may inhibit efforts to create community.

Faculty may also not value community on the campus because, in many circumstances, the community that is most important to them is the academic discipline. Academic scholars have acquired training and language that, in effect, isolate them from all others who do not possess the same knowledge or jargon. Therefore, the faculty member may lack interest in campus community as a result of personality type, training, and competing loyalties to other communities.

Student affairs staff must learn to recognize faculty reluctance about campus community for what it is and not take rejection personally. To take it personally is to sentence oneself to a life of frustration in academe; the life of the academic is to express disagreement among friend and foe alike.

Involving College Model

Some campuses are better able than others to aspire toward and achieve community. The "involving colleges" study (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 1991) identifies attributes of campuses that have been more successful than others in this effort. This qualitative study describes a "seamless tapestry" of educational opportunities that draw students, faculty, and staff together in common community pursuit. This seamless tapestry reflects several attributes that enhance student involvement and, therefore, student retention, satisfaction, and graduation:

Institutions that have a clear mission, kept plainly in view, encourage involvement.

Institutions that value and expect student initiative and responsibility encourage involvement.

Institutions that recognize and respond to the total student experience encourage involvement.

Institutions that provide small, "human-scale" environments and multiple subcommunities encourage involvement.

Institutions that value students and take them and their learning seriously encourage involvement.

Institutions that generate a sense of "specialness" encourage involvement.

Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) provide both a method for assessing the campus involving culture and a model for the practitioner to look at changes that could be made to improve the involving environment. The more a campus is able to achieve an atmosphere of involvement for all its members, the more a sense of community will be felt by all.

Community Within Diversity

One of the most difficult challenges of the modern-day college or university is finding a workable unity that embraces the profound diversity present on many campuses. If this diversity is not already present, it will likely characterize the vast majority of campuses in the twenty-first century. The early colonial colleges of the United States had very little diversity. Therefore, the establishment of community was made easy at least from the point of view of the shared experiences of faculty and students. However, the diversity of today's and tomorrow's American colleges is mind-boggling. How can community be established within this extreme diversity?

The disintegration of community on college and university campuses is reflected in a recent survey conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1991). This survey indicated that 73 percent of faculty at research universities rank the "sense of community" at their institutions as only fair or poor; this measure improves to a low of 43 percent ranking "sense of community" as fair or poor at liberal arts colleges. Neither figure can be considered admirable. The survey also found that 71 percent of presidents and student affairs officers believed that the most important factor in improving campus life at their institutions was a greater effort to build a stronger sense of community.

Cortes (1991) weaves a discussion of our nation's motto, "e pluribus unum," into an interesting proposition that could help in creating community even within diversity. He says that our society is founded on the balancing act of being many and, simultaneously, of being one. The juxtaposition of these concepts challenges a college campus "to create a climate in which temporary Pluribus isolationism and continuous Unum integration operate in a mutually constructive fashion" (p. 12). This means that colleges need not fear the interest and yearning of like-background students to associate with one another as long as there are community values that are respected and protected, thereby drawing the various individuals and sub-groups together for a common purpose.

Campuses vary a great deal in terms of whether or not they work at being

a community. Generally, a campus that does not work to be a community will not achieve it. Community is more difficult to achieve the larger the number of students, faculty, and staff and the broader the diversity in the community. But the benefits of working toward a greater sense of community have been repeatedly demonstrated.

Achieving Community Through Professional Work

Many student affairs staffs have worked to create community since the founding of the profession; this is unquestionable and should be celebrated. The Student Personnel Point of View (American Council on Education, [1937] 1986) has been used as a mandate that defines the purpose of the student personnel, student services, student development, or student affairs divisions of most campuses. While at face value this choice of mandates seems appropriate and helpful, it has failed in another major way.

The authors of *The Student Personnel Point of View* were educators first; they were prominent members of the American Council on Education. The nineteen members of the committee set out to describe or define the functions that a campus needed to fulfill in order to nurture the holistic development of students within the education community. *The Student Personnel Point of View* was intended to be an institution-wide philosophy or commitment as opposed to the philosophy of a specialized collection of services, and staff on the campus. Perhaps a contributing factor to the isolation of student personnel philosophy from faculty concerns was the enumeration of student personnel services in the 1937 statement. Had the philosophy been independently established and implementation strategies described separately, would our institutions of higher education have grasped the importance of our point of view for the entire institution?

What was intended as an institutional perspective instead came to delimit a territory or organizational unit. This fractured the intent of many of our American educational institutions, the holistic treatment of students. The fracture resulted in the tearing of the "seamless tapestry of educational opportunity" that was the heritage of student personnel and is the current and future promise of a reunited approach to holistic education.

The impact of only student personnel professionals taking *The Student Personnel Point of View* as the charge for their work was that the concern for the whole student in the campus community was driven to the margin of campus life. Concern for holism and community, had *The Student Personnel Point of View* been taken seriously and adopted pervasively, would have been the mandate for the entire campus rather than the specialized student personnel staff.

This issue relates to the potential fulfillment of community in that, with *The Student Personnel Point of View* marginalized, the value of community was

also pushed to the margin. The process of community building requires the commitment and attention of all in the campus environs, not just a small band of specialists who serve as an adjunct to the faculty.

The point is that, in many ways, student personnel professionals marginalized themselves. There is not much question that faculty willingly allowed this to happen. After all, faculty attention to research and the advancement of knowledge and teaching could be more easily focused if the demanding and sometimes bothersome out-of-class responsibility for students could be delegated to someone else. In contrast to what has happened, student personnel staff could have been empowered and would have empowered others had they shared the tenets of The Student Personnel *Point of View* more broadly and, thereby, engaged the broader campus in the creation of community.

The days of formation for student personnel are gone. Can student personnel now return, in a new enlightenment, toward the role of fostering community on the campus? Can student personnel philosophy be shared so that all educators, faculty, staff, and students become agents in support of community? Indeed, will there be the rediscovery of self and the healing of a yearning for community for which so many cries are heard today?

Conclusion

In a recent attempt to describe community and help the world find ways to reach it, John Gardner (1991, p. 29) proposed that

it would be a grave mistake to imagine that in a great burst of energy we can rebuild our communities and then turn to other tasks. That assumes a degree of stability we once knew but may never see again in our lifetime. We can never stop rebuilding.

The communities we build today may eventually be eroded or torn apart by the crosscurrents of contemporary life. Then we rebuild. We can't know all the forms community will take, but we know what values and the kinds of supporting structures we want to preserve. We are a community building species. We might become remarkably ingenious at creating new forms of community for a swiftly changing world.

Although written for a broader audience than student personnel workers or even educators, this description appears to be our challenge. We are, indeed, a "community-building species" with a contribution to make. Community making is our heritage, and now we must attempt to find ways to fulfill the vision that has been ours from the inception of student personnel work.

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