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Planning and Assessment Equal Accountability

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The author presents a program designed to help student affairs staffs plan and assess student growth and thereby demonstrate accountability.

INTRODUCTION

As the higher education environment continues to change, the need to plan, the ability to assess change, and the significance of accountability become increasingly important in student affairs. Evidence of this is the popularity of a recent book on strategic planning, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education* (Keller, 1983). Emphasis on strategic planning has direct implications for funding. Consequently, many student affairs officers must justify the relationship between programs and services they offer and the educational mission of their institutions. Unfortunately, this takes us back to the age-old issue of whether student affairs programs are central to the educational purpose of colleges and universities.

This article offers a means of addressing the issues of planning, assessment, and accountability. The approach is based on generally accepted theories of human development. The article presents a program designed to help student affairs staffs plan and assess student growth (and hence program effectiveness) and thereby demonstrate accountability.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There are three "givens" concerning education with which most people will agree:

1. People can change.
2. Educational environments can assist with that change.
3. Change, even in educational environments, involves more than intellectual development.

A variety of human development theories attempt to explain how change (*growth* may be more appropriate) takes place. Cognitive Development theorists describe how one thinks or perceives information. The work of Perry (1970), Kohlberg (1971), and Piaget (1956) falls into this category. Typology theorists examine recurring individual differences that affect one's behavior. They include Clark and Trow (1966), Holland (1973), and Heath (1964). Another way to describe growth is through Person-Environment Interaction theories, which attempt to describe how the physical and social environment can be designed to provide an atmosphere conducive to personal growth. Theorists in this area include Pace (1964), Stem (1962), Astin (1986), and Moos (1973).

The foundation for the work presented here, however, is based on Multidimensional or Psychosocial theories that describe growth as occurring in stages resulting from the accomplishment of various developmental tasks. Multidimensional or Psychosocial theorists include Erikson (1963), Chickering (1969), Havighurst (1953), Maslow (1962), Blos (1941), Blocher (1966), and Prince (1973). The life stage concept states that certain developmental characteristics are common to everyone and that these characteristics seem to emerge in regular stages. Havighurst defines a developmental task as one that "arises at or about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks" (Miller & Prince, 1976, P. 3).

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY

The work of Chickering (1969) and Prince (1973) has particular relevance for this discussion since they both concentrate on a stage of development between the ages of 18 and 25, which Chickering refers to as the young adult. Chickering lists seven vectors of development that can be influenced by six major aspects of a college environment. Prince delineates three major developmental tasks, each with three subtasks. The Prince formulation provides a basis for the rationale presented here because of its relationship to Chickering's vectors, to the Multidimensional or Psychosocial theory outlined above, and to that theory's role in a planning and assessment program (to be described later).

Prince's developmental tasks are as follows:

Task I: Developing Autonomy

- Subtask A. Developing Emotional Autonomy
- Subtask B. Developing Instrumental Autonomy
- Subtask C. Developing Interdependence

Task II: Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

- Subtask D. Developing Tolerance
- Subtask E. Developing Mature Relationships with Peers
- Subtask F. Developing Intimate Relations with the Opposite Sex

Task III: Developing Purpose

- Subtask G. Developing Appropriate Educational Plans
- Subtask H. Developing Mature Career Plans
- Subtask I. Developing Mature Life-Style Plans

Using this and the preceding theoretical formulations as a basis, Miller and Prince (1976) have delineated the following as the basic assumptions underlying a student development model.

1. Human development is a continuous and cumulative process of physical, psychological, and social growth which can be divided into an orderly series of life stages. Each stage is characterized by certain developmental tasks that require a human to alter his or her present behavior and master new learning.
2. Development is most likely to occur in an environment where change is anticipated, where individuals and groups work together to actively influence the future rather than just reacting to it after the fact.
3. Systematic integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor experiences produces the most effective development.
4. Several abilities and skills that facilitate growth in others have been identified; these can be learned, used, and taught by student development educators.
5. An individual's development can be advanced by exposure to an organized problem-solving process that enables him or her to complete increasingly complex developmental tasks.
6. Development is enhanced when students, faculty members, and student affairs practitioners work collaboratively to promote the continuous development of all.

Considering the preceding information, it seems reasonable to conclude that:

1. A sound body of theory relating to human development exists.
2. The student development model directly applies this body of theory to the postsecondary educational setting.
3. The types of developmental tasks young adults engage in can be identified and assessed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS WORK

The tasks for student affairs professionals seem clear:

1. Our work must be guided by sound theory and models that apply that theory to our daily activities.
2. What we do must be planned in such a way as to have a direct impact on the growth of the students with whom we work.
3. We must be able to assess the effect of what we do in order to have the information necessary to alter our course of action, to change our focus, to try new approaches, and to be held accountable.

4. We must be able to justify our role in contributing to a student's education; we must be able to document *growth* as a result of our efforts and distinguish that from *change* that occurs naturally as part of the maturation process.

A PROGRAM FOR PLANNING, ASSESSMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Every student affairs staff is, or should be, involved in planning in one way or another. Some planning efforts may be very sophisticated, using various grids, spheres, wheels, cubes, or other geometric shapes to try to "simplify" the process. Others may use M.B.O., P.E.R.T., or other management practices. On the other end of the continuum, student affairs professionals may simply sit down at their desks at the beginning of the day and fill in their Things To Do Today pad. The process suggested below is less cumbersome than some of those mentioned above, and perhaps more valid in relation to the theories discussed earlier.

Each area within a student affairs program can influence students' growth and development in a variety of ways. There is certain to be overlap but most likely there are also areas that have more direct responsibility for "developing mature career plans" than others--the career planning office, for example.

One of the most logical *planning tools* a student affairs program can use, therefore, is one that focuses on the developmental tasks of students. Thus, when a student affairs staff plans for the next year and decides how it will spend its time (and funds), each person delineates how what he or she plans to do will address particular developmental tasks of students. If staff members cannot do this, then they probably have not carefully thought out why they want to initiate or implement programs.

Prince's (1973) formulation has led to the creation of the *Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI)* (Winston, Miller, & Prince, 1987). The *SDTLI* is a 140-item inventory designed to assess a student's level of development in the following areas:

1. *Establishing and clarifying Purpose* in terms of educational involvement, career planning, lifestyle planning, life management, and cultural participation.
2. *Developing mature interpersonal relationships* in terms of peers, tolerance, and emotional autonomy.
3. *Academic autonomy*.
4. *Good health and wellness practices*.
5. *The extent of any intimate relationships*.

The instrument and its resulting profile form the backbone of the planning, assessment, and accountability approach suggested here.

In this approach, one does not simply list Goals and Objectives for the Career Services Office or Plans for 1989-90, which may or may not have a sense of direction, purpose, and hoped-for outcomes. Instead, student affairs staff members are required to confront the developmental tasks their students face and then design programs and activities and provide services that deliberately address those aspects of students' growth.

*Your College
Student Affairs Division
Departmental Student Development Program Plan for 1989-1990*

Department: <i>Career Services</i>		Staff Member: <i>Getta job</i>
STDLI Component to be Addressed by the Department	Program Description and Timeframe (Developmental Task Addressed in Parentheses)	Evaluation, Assessment and Recommendations Regarding Future Programs (Use additional sheets as needed)
<i>Establishing and Clarifying Purpose</i>		<i>Fall, 1989</i>
Career Planning (CP)	1. Set up new internship locations on and off campus. (CP)	1.
Lifestyle Planning (LP)	2. Coordinate activities of Career Services Office and Cooperative Education Program. (CP)	2.
Life Management (LM)	3. Incorporate career-life planning activities into freshman orientation course. (LM)	3.
<i>Spring, 1990</i>		<i>Spring, 1990</i>
	1. Offer career development workshops on career clarification, resume writing, interview technique. (CP)	1.
	2. Conduct Look into Future Employment Seminars. (LP)	2.
	3. Distribute senior resume booklet to local employers. (CP)	3.

Figure I
Planning Form

By planning their year in this manner, student affairs staff members have a clearly defined "road map" to follow. They can see their work throughout the year as part of a specific plan aimed at directly affecting the personal growth and development of the students with whom they work. Figure I provides an example of a simple planning form that has been completed to show how this approach might be implemented.

The implications for planning and accountability are virtually self-explanatory. The process allows an entire student affairs staff to set out a deliberate plan for student development. Each staff member knows what programs are her or his responsibility and what aspects of development they are designed to address. There are two areas of accountability: (a) Is the program accomplished as planned? and (b) Have the developmental tasks

actually been addressed? Assessment is more complicated. This is where the *Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory* comes into play.

ASSESSMENT, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

One must ask, "How do you assess an overall student affairs program?" Beyond that, if it came down to having to provide empirical support for continuing your program's current level of funding, or to justify additional resources, could you do it?

If a student affairs program is designed with students' growth and development in mind, and if the program is executed as designed, those involved in its creation and implementation should be able to assess its degree of success as it relates to student development.

The *Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory* is important in this assessment if the program is designed to address the dimensions of the inventory suggested above. Students would take the *SDTLI* as entering freshmen and again at the end of each year of enrollment. Their scores would be expected to increase. The key question, however, would be whether the increase is due to the *impact* of the college experience-and the student affairs programs designed to influence their development-or to the *change* that occurs as a result of maturation.

Astin (1986) faced this same question when attempting to document the impact of the collegiate experience. To address the issue, the statistical analyses in his longitudinal study involving over 300 institutions and 200,000 students involved two stages:

First, information on each entering freshman is combined statistically through multiple-regression techniques to obtain a predicted or expected score on each outcome measure under investigation.... The second stage of the analysis determines the effects of college experiences by comparing predicted outcomes based on entering freshman characteristics with actual outcomes measured separately for students in different college environments. (p. 17)

In the case referred to in the passage above, *impact* was viewed as a function of the time and intensity of exposure to the college environment.

Such a degree of statistical certainty might not be attainable on an individual campus, especially if the number of freshmen is small. Likewise, many institutions might not have the resources available to conduct such extensive research. Nevertheless, paying attention to changing *SDTLI* scores over time could be very useful to student affairs staff and students alike.

The changing scores, when viewed scale by scale, could provide a logical reference point for college counselors, advisors, and student affairs professionals in their discussions with students about academic as well as cocurricular interests. Students could use some of the *SDTLI* data to supplement their resumes and academic transcripts upon graduation (documenting personal development changes relevant to employers and graduate schools).

One could also rely on somewhat more indirect measures of the success of such an approach to student development. For example, Astin's (1986) work cites involvement in the institution as one of the most significant indicators of

student success, satisfaction, and persistence. An analysis of data such as retention rates and degree of involvement (through such variables as participation in campus organizations and the intensity of participation, i.e., leadership positions held) might be sufficient to imply that deliberately planned student development programs, focusing on tasks in the *SDTLI*, are accomplishing their objectives.

Regardless of the extent of the statistical analysis employed in this last phase, linking human development theory to this model for student development programming, which includes a format for planning assessment that leads to accountability, seems an appropriate way to position student affairs divisions for educating the whole student. Not only does it provide a means of ongoing feedback to students, it also offers a vehicle for articulating the mission of an institution's student affairs program to other internal and external constituencies.

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