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THE CHIEF STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICER AND LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: FIVE AREAS FOR THOUGHT

Today's chief student affairs officers' role continues to expand, yet many question the value and purpose of student affairs. Because of the expanded role and responsibility associated with this position, it is more challenging and stressful requiring innovative wholistic leadership skills. This article summarizes five areas the author believes a chief student affairs officer should possess to be a successful visionary leader. The mastery of these areas which are broad and inclusive can help to increase not only the credibility of the chief student affairs officer, but also the significance of the services provided by student affairs. Mastering these areas with creativity and vision can enhance the leadership role of the chief student affairs officer creating an effective partnership on the president and decision-making council.

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The influence of student affairs divisions on higher education continues to expand and become more vital to the successful matriculation of students and the academic mission of students. This growth of the role and scope of student affairs has occurred for numerous reasons, including a changing and diverse student population. The influx of handicapped, learning disabled, ethnic minority, female, older, part-time, and

international students have changed American higher education from the domain of middle- and upper-class citizens to a heterogeneous community demanding exemplary teaching, advising, interpersonal, and leadership skills from not only teaching faculty members but also student affairs professionals.

The continuing moral and social evolution of society has brought about drastic changes in attitudes among today's college students. With these changes, college officials are witnessing an increase in alcohol and substance abuse, hazing incidents, date rape, mental health problems, and sexual promiscuity. In addition, the academy is experiencing a resurgence of racial and cultural conflicts that evolved in response to society's efforts to remedy past discriminatory practices (Urchel, 1995, Shea, 1996). Presidents and senior university officials depend on student affairs professionals to address these and related campus issues. To achieve this while respecting the needs and concerns of today's college students requires student affairs leadership characterized by vision, flexibility, and innovation.

Common Perception of Student Affairs

Although student affairs plays an important role in student adjustment and development in college, it has something of a "Superman and Clark Kent" image. At times, professionals in the field are very proactive, resolving difficult issues thoroughly and swiftly. On other occasions, professionals are guilty of hedging, failing to demonstrate the courage to make tough decisions, especially those that might be viewed as controversial. Gerald Welch (1986) makes this point when he states that student affairs professionals seem to have a Rodney Dangerfield complex. Unlike staff in academic areas, they are constantly looking for "respect" and opportunities for leadership. In addition, many faculty members and academic administrators tend to believe that student affairs activities and programs duplicate and compete with faculty-developed services and programs of instruction. From this point of view, the services provided by student affairs are not essential for students or the university (Dressel, 1981; Elsner and Ames, 1983; Manning, 1996). The intense constant and critical scrutiny of student

affairs by the academic community occurs precisely because of a perception that strong leadership is lacking in student affairs. If there ever is to be strong leadership in student affairs, chief student affairs officers need to be aggressively committed to student development, and they should have the ability to communicate their goals and objectives to the university community (Welch, 1986, p. 11).

In his book, *The Chief Student Affairs Officer: Leader, Manager, Mediator, Educator*, Arthur Sandeen stresses that the Chief Student Affairs Officer should be a strong effective leader with the ability to communicate his areas to different interest. Sandeen's (1991) position on this issue is reflected in the following statement: Student Affairs has often been viewed by others within the college or university as a peripheral or adjunct service, but in the past twenty-five years, many CSAOs have helped to move student affairs into the main educational arena of the campus. The position is now part of the central management team of the institution and has assumed responsibilities it did not include years ago, and this "news" ought to be made known to others in and out of higher education. Faculty, academic deans, business officers, governing boards, and (where appropriate) state higher education officials and legislators need to be made aware of the changes. They may hold stereotypic notions of what a chief student affairs officer's role is, and a current discussion of actual responsibilities may serve to correct some old perceptions (p. 9).

Chief student affairs officers should be able to set proactive goals and provide the leadership to attain them (Brodzinski, 1984). McDade (1989) states that student affairs professionals often have been cast in the reactive role, responding to student crises and requests for service. There is now a unique opportunity to take a proactive leadership role, to offer innovative programming that will improve not only campus life but also the total educational process. Chief student affairs officers can provide proactive leadership by viewing their positions as visionary, persuasive, and invaluable. The following are examples of critical interrelated areas where strong leadership from the chief student affairs officer will not only enhance the position of student affairs in the administrative

hierarchy, but also make more credible our insistence on the necessity of student affairs.

Effective Leadership Style

John Gardner (1961) writes that sometimes leaders have to look beyond the groups they are leading and grasp their relationship to the larger realities. Chief student affairs officers should assume such a leadership style in order to effectively interact with students, faculty members, administrators, board members, and the community. Headed by a leader who is knowledgeable in all segments of higher education, a division of student affairs will not fall into a parlous state, engendering cynicism about its values. The leadership skills of the chief student affairs officer should be the key for diffusing cynicism directed at the student affairs mission. An able leader fosters support for that mission by explaining how student affairs complements and enhances the academic mission of colleges and universities.

Although the role of student affairs is questioned by many in higher education, most university presidents value and welcome leadership, assistance, and guidance from chief student affairs officers (Shay, 1984). To fulfill this trust, it is imperative that chief student affairs officers provide these things, and further that they provide them in the broader context, beyond the daily campus-based responsibilities of the division. Good administrators cope sufficiently with daily problems and keep departments functioning (Reif, 1977), but that alone is not enough. Self-analysis and the development of long-range plans are critical requirements, and they are not the focal points of day-to-day operations. For example, handling roommate problems or changing the decor in residence halls does not require vision or comprehensive analytical skills. However, absorbing the impact of an enrollment decrease--as it affects housing, food service, tuition, counseling activities, and other student-oriented services--requires careful analysis; collaboration with deans, directors, and members of the president's senior staff; and effective planning. Decisions on larger issues affect the total environment of institutions and their future directions in key areas such as budget and personnel, office

space, classroom space, and funding. Management and conciliation skills are important, but much more goes into total leadership.

Communicating the Mission of Student Affairs

Chief student affairs officers should clearly state the roles and goals of their divisions to academic deans, administrators, faculty members, alumni, community groups, and students, since the function of student affairs remains nebulous to many of these groups in higher education (Koltai and Wolf, 1984). Many faculty members believe that the major role of student affairs is to attain and maintain reasonable control of student behavior or to "keep students busy" so they will not be a concern to the faculty and administration (Dressel, 1981, p. 95). Chief student affairs officers cannot accept this myopic view of their purpose. They must emphasize the need to establish collaborative partnerships with academic departments. Developing effective partnerships between faculty and student affairs professionals is critical to maximizing the educational potential of colleges and universities (Streit, 1993, p. 40). They should communicate how their programs, activities, and facilities create a wholesome community environment that enhances the personal, social, and psychological development of students, in turn positively influencing the institution's retention of students and graduation rate. Welch (1986, p. 15) states that chief student affairs officers should emphasize and foster awareness of the cumulative impact that their work has on students' educational goals. Chief student affairs officers must take every opportunity to educate faculty members about the impact that programs and services have on the retention of students.

Institutional Planning

The chief student affairs officer should play a vital role in institutional planning. Even though the missions and goals of institutions are, to a large extent, determined by the chief academic officer, faculty, president, and board of trustees, chief student affairs officers should play a part in formulating objectives. The chief student affairs officer should be an active member of the institution's academic management team and join

with the chief academic affairs officer in monitoring and safeguarding the educational experience for student (Streit, 1993, p. 42). In this role, presidents and institutions' financial administrators expect the chief student affairs officers to be knowledgeable about money, computers, and fundraising (Sandeen, p. 10).

Approximately 50% to 75% of students' time outside the instructional classroom is spent with a student affairs professional (counselor, advisor, tutor) in a program or activity sponsored by student affairs (SGA, sorority/fraternity, concert, play) or in a student affairs operated facility (residence hall, student center, counseling center). Because of the close contact student affairs has with students, chief student affairs officers can and should provide accurate information and data to support not only the co-curricular needs of students but their academic support needs as well. The presence of student affairs leadership is essential, because institutional planning usually involves increasing funds for selected programs that are more in line with institutional goals. Programs and services that are not compatible with long-range goals are drastically reduced or eliminated. Student affairs programs and activities are usually the first to receive cuts in funding, and at some institutions their funds are diverted to instructional and research programs. When such cuts are being considered, it is essential that chief student affairs officers show effective leadership by demonstrating how student affairs programs enhance the academic mission of the institution. This task requires a chief student affairs officer who has the skills and expertise to form positive partnerships and collaborative relationships throughout the academic community (Johnson, 1989).

Decision-Making Skills

Chief student affairs officers should view their position on the university decision-making team as one which enhances the overall effectiveness of the decisionmaking process. Johnson (1989, p. 28) states that many chief student affairs officers seem reluctant to provide leadership beyond their areas, because they perceive their role as one of support to the president, the academic vice president, and the deans rather than as one of equal membership in the decision-making process. Such an operational philosophy is

not one of visionary leadership; it is rather more reflective of a manager or administrator. As members of decision-making teams, chief student affairs officers should be as knowledgeable of their entire institutions as they are about their own divisions. Explaining clearly how quality student affairs programming contributes to the academic success of students, as well as to the academic mission of the institution, is imperative. A chief student affairs officer's political savvy-knowing when to bargain, negotiate, compromise, build alliances, or use persuasion-in seeking resources that contribute to the institution's academic stability oftentimes separates a strong, vibrant student affairs operation from one which is poorly funded and weakly organized.

Human Relations Skills

With large numbers of professional, support, and student staff in the student affairs division, the chief student affairs officer must establish personnel practices that enable them to perform their duties, participate in the decision-making process, and have opportunities for professional advancement and growth (Sandeem, 1991, p. 5).

Changing demographics of staff and students make it necessary for chief student affairs officers to possess exceptional leadership skills in the human relations area. Being effective in this area means possessing not only drive and determination, but also human qualities such as trust, modesty, politeness, patience, and sensitivity (Ninomeya, 1988). Front-line staff members should be made to feel appreciated and to believe that their chief student affairs officer values their contribution to the division's work. Effective human relations leadership also requires respecting individual differences, getting to know staff members as individuals, and when possible learning their needs, understanding what motivates them, and structuring relationships with them to maximize their unique strengths (Borelli, 1984). These tasks are important if student affairs expects to maintain high staff morale and resulting high-quality programs and activities. Placing value on human relations skills makes it easier for chief student affairs officers to motivate staff members so that they, too, view their role and work from an institutional perspective.

Equity and diversity among professional staff should be priorities for chief student affairs officers. Because college and university populations are becoming more diverse, with more ethnic minority, handicapped, and adult students, student affairs should be willing to take the lead in making the academic environment a place where diversity exists among staff as well as students. Eventually, two-thirds of college-age students will come from ethnic minority groups (ACE, 1988). Most of the problems and issues institutions face in meeting these students' needs will be both student affairs- and academic affairs-related. Therefore, the hiring of ethnic minorities, of women, and of handicapped staff members, should be a priority. The presence of members of these groups on college campuses provides cultural and social awareness for all faculty, students, and administrators (Massey, 1987; Sagarina, M. A.; Johnsrud, 1992). Chief student affairs officers who emphasize equity and possess human relations skills that embrace diversity have a true commitment to creating a campus ambiance that is warm and receptive to the different ethnic, religious, social, and cultural groups attending the academy.

End Notes

Chief student affairs officers should be assertive and visible on their campuses. To ensure this, they should communicate their division's goals and objectives as they relate to the academic mission of the institution, and they should demonstrate the skills and abilities necessary to create partnerships with academic departments. The chief student affairs officer's demonstration of effective leadership in institutional planning; ability to communicate the mission of student affairs; and skills in human relations and decision-making will motivate student affairs staff members to view their roles as vital, from an institutional perspective. Effective and innovative leadership in these areas will go a long way in resolving the identity and credibility issues that many chief student affairs officers encounter today.

Lastly, chief student affairs officers should be the most vocal campus advocates of quality education. Their effectiveness as integral members of the administrative

hierarchy depends on their ability to understand and gain the support and confidence of the campus community.

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