

Philosophy of Student Affairs

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The purpose of higher education is to produce educated citizens. These citizens will one day serve as leaders and impact our world. These citizens will one day make decisions that will alter the way we look at life. Some will change the course of humanity, while others will change the view of society. Some will pursue economic changes, while others hope to change the views of their family and communities. As student affairs practitioners, we need to support and educate these citizens, our students, to be well rounded and sophisticated individuals.

There are five pillars of commitment that I hold myself to when dealing with students. These pillars form my philosophy of student affairs. They include: academic enhancement of the student's knowledge, personal growth of the student's integrity, diversifying the student's mind, creating a relationship with our students to build their personal character, and sincerity and compassion in the student's wisdom. These five pillars are my guide to providing students a firm foundation that they will utilize after they leave their alma mater. Over all, the foundation of my personal philosophy follows the belief of educational excellence within the context of human excellence; valuing the maturation of character and mind; and the delicate balance between academic enhancement, personal development, and social integration with diverse individuals of our global society.

*Pillar One: Academic enhancement of a student's knowledge.* One of the main reasons for students to enter or even consider a degree in higher education is for the academic enhancement of their mind. As student affairs practitioners, we oversee our students and persuade our students to experience as much as they can in their short time in college. Although academic learning is not only achieved within the classroom,

the classroom is a place where students can learn the advanced knowledge of their given profession.

As we know, a degree earned in higher education aids a student in the professional world. It is our duty to make sure that what the students are learning and gaining from the classrooms is incorporated in everyday tasks. Whether it is leadership and organization skills, time management, responsibility, or even social interactions, it is the connections outside the classroom that pull everything together.

*Pillar Two: Personal growth of the student's integrity.* Perhaps the most interesting concept is building a student's integrity. The integrity of an individual is an attribute that the individual needs to personally develop. As student affairs practitioners, we are helping develop our student's thinking, to be loyal to their morals and ethical principles. The students are charged with an obligation. It is the responsibility of the student to maintain the standards that they have set for themselves. When in leadership positions, students are responsible not only for maintaining their personal integrity, but also expand responsibility to their organization. Personal growth will occur when our students maintain their integrity consistently.

I believe a student's word should be accepted until significant evidence exists to prove otherwise. There may be occasions when students are questioned as to their behavior, performance, conduct, accuracy, or the completeness of the final product. Generally as student affairs practitioners, we are to challenge our student's ideas, to help them to think in different ways, but doubting a student's integrity, is unprofessional and should be avoided.

On the other hand, trust is linked to an individual's integrity and that trust can only be earned. Only through continuous interactions can an individual earn the trust of another. Trust comes from a commitment to truthfulness: being completely honest and outspoken in all instances. As student affairs practitioners, we should be good role models for our students, as our integrity is also noted by our students.

*Pillar Three: Diversifying the student's mind.* My heart lies in this pillar that uses the common buzz word of "diversity." But what is diversity education for a college student? What aspects are included in diversity? Realistically, can we educate every student about every aspect of diversity thoroughly? Diversity can include, but is not limited to race, religion, spirituality, color, sex, gender identity, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, ideologies, parental status, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic class, veteran, and the list goes on. University employees do a great job in educating college students on the pros and cons of every issue, but diversity education is best learned through the peer-to-peer interaction and first hand experiences with other cultures. This variety of connections with their peers can help clarify personal values and interests, help students learn more about themselves, and develop new social and leadership skills (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen, 2005).

Although diversity education is very important on campuses, as student affairs practitioners, we should model diversity acceptance and awareness in our personal lives and reinforce to students the importance of interactions with a diverse group of peers. Being engaged with a diverse group of individuals requires a student to actively communicate with various individuals who are not similar. By building connections and

commonalities with a variety of individuals, slow supportive and inclusive communities will be built. Students will then feel less constrained to share unique aspects of their personal identity with their peers. The Division of Student Affairs needs to stress upon students the importance of integrating principles of learning based on direct interactions with others.

*Pillar Four: Creating a relationship with our students to build their personal character.* Building relationships with our students is a key and vital component of their education at an institution. Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) stated that adult and peer interactions are some of the essential developmental aspects that promote the development of a leadership identity. One of the most effective ways to build strong relationships with our students is through mentoring and advising. Our job is to cultivate our students into leaders for tomorrow. During my undergraduate education, it was the relationships between me and my mentors/advisors that helped me through the rough times. Even though none of them supplied me with the answers to my issues, they gave me strength and insight that I cherish to this day.

Also, by being a mentor and advisor to my current students, I know that these relationships are important in their personal educational experience when they have not had the opportunity to build a good relationship with other professionals and teaching faculty. One of the most important concepts of my philosophy of higher education is that all aspects of learning revolve around building relationships. The concept of building relationships can be applied to almost any functional area within higher education. On the academic side of the house, mentorship is vital in developing new and creative insights and theories.

*Pillar Five: Sincerity and compassion in the student's wisdom.* In general, institutional affiliates need to help develop their undergraduate students beyond academics; students need to know how to apply what they have learned. Intelligence and information are not enough for our society to move toward a better future. For example, certain politicians are well-educated, but are using their intelligence and education for negative progression in our society. These individuals may have fulfilled their set goals, but in the long run, equality and serenity is lost. According to Sternberg (2001), wisdom is the use of the student's creativity toward a common progression by balancing their own interests, other's interests, and merging moral and ethical values. Student affairs practitioners should help grow their student's wisdom to encompass sincerity and compassion.

More often than not, in traditional or annual philanthropic events, students have lost the vision of the actual goals that were set in the previous years. For example, if the event is in a form of a competition, the event ends up being more about winning rather than what the purpose of the event was, losing sight of the compassion and true meaning of the event.

Wisdom and responsibility can be taught through a series of events. They are not traits that an individual can retain overnight. Wisdom is an attribute each human being should acquire throughout their lifetime. Student affairs practitioners should give a helping hand in this process so that college students will not be misled to the habit of irrational thinking or selfishness.

Progress in our society is earned and learned when invested with a deep passion. *Once the flame of our passion touches our hearts, that passion will burn in our*

*hearts for eternity.* Individuals discover their passion best when they are challenged by real-life problems. My philosophy of student affairs is supported by the five pillars of commitment that I hold myself to when dealing with my students. As a part of higher education institutions, my ambition is to help students work and live productively in our ever-changing global society, while understanding and appreciating diversity and equality amongst all individuals and even within themselves. My strong stance in my philosophy of student affairs for identity development and self-growth in each citizen will allow my passion to help my students achieve their desires in life, as they progress into the future.

Resources

Sternberg, R.J. (2001). Why schools should teach for wisdom: The balance theory of wisdom in educational settings. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(4), 227-245.

Komives S. R., Owen, J. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Mainella, F. C., and Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(6), 593-611.