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Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs

Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 1


December 2017

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Anna L. Patton

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Recommended Citation

Patton, A. L. (2016). Who wrote the books: A history of the history of student affairs. *The Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 3(1), 42-59.

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Who wrote the books:

A history of the history of student affairs



Anna Louise Patton is the Director of the Impact Leadership Village at NC State and is December 2017 Doctoral Graduate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in Educational Studies with a concentration in Cultural Studies. Anna aims to bridge her current work with previous academic and professional experience in college student affairs through an intentional focus on critical analysis of the field—our history, philosophy, and theoretical foundations. As a scholar-practitioner, Anna is deeply committed to living a love ethic within student affairs work. Anna currently resides in Raleigh, North Carolina with her partner, Bryan. In their free time, they enjoy painting, playing with their puppy, Mr. Spock, reading, and dancing.

Anna Louise Patton

Director, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

I offer this historiography for students in and faculty of graduate preparatory programs as well as current professionals in student affairs. I loop between presenting traditional materials telling the history of student affairs and my own critical analysis in order to offer a richer perspective of the field's history. My goal in this paper is to trouble the fixed historical content I studied in my own student affairs graduate program, which serves as one representation of common practice in the field at large. I conclude the paper by offering implications and considerations for future directions and dialogue in the field.

I am drawn to this topic because of my own professional background as a student affairs practitioner. In my graduate preparation program, our faculty stressed having a clear understanding of the history of student affairs, but I did not question student affairs history as I felt it accurately spoke to me and reflected my identities: a neurotypical, white, cisheterosexual women from a

middle class family. For me, the history of student affairs remained a fixed series of dates, names, and publications to memorize lacking any critical analysis into what might be missing.

I recognize the history of student affairs is a topic addressed by many preparatory programs. As one representation of a preparatory program's history curriculum, I entered into this inquiry by revisiting my own graduate preparation program historical materials including: *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*, *Rentz's Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education*, and *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration*.

Student Affairs History & Critical Analysis

In this section, I chose to explore the history of student affairs conceptually from the colonization of US America through the turn of the 21st century. To open up spaces and directions for future inquiries, I include a wide

breadth of critical theory perspectives to illustrate the diverse ways critical historical research might be taken up.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial perspectives are one critical approach omitted from the history of student affairs. Scholars implementing postcolonial analysis challenge the ways in which Western perspectives and histories permeate, dominate, and silence non-western knowledges, experiences, and realities. Scholarship using postcolonial theory provides one entry points to retell the origins of student affairs work. Based on their telling of history, I draw the conclusion that the authors' formal studies in history did not include critical, postcolonial points of view. The authors offer no analysis of the implications of importing the Oxford-Cambridge Model from England while colonizing US American. Additionally, the authors benignly name *in loco parentis* as the first philosophical foundation for student affairs as faculty stood in the place of students' parents; however, there is no conversation of the dynamics of colonization in the model of *in loco parentis* as it was adopted from the Oxford-Cambridge model. Further, *in loco parentis* is in place of whose parents? And with whose values? For what aims? The authors of student affairs history craft a colonial historical period of student affairs history that centers the experiences of European white colonizers and omits the experiences of Native American peoples.

Critical Race Theory

I employ CRT to further unpack the whiteness centered in the field's history. First, the authors position development of predominantly, historically white colleges and universities as the basis for the progression of history with specialized institutions for African American as secondary footnotes (Rentz, 2004; Thelin, 2003). Aligned with the claims of critical race theory, white supremacy keeps the experiences of white people as a centered norm while silencing or minimizing the voices of people of color. I contend that the authors center whiteness in the history of student affairs by relegating the history of African Americans in higher education to a cursory, sterile connection to federal policy changes while ignoring the legacy and impacts of slavery occurring simultaneously in the country.

Extensions of Critical Race Theory. Scholars have employed CRT as a foundation for exploring the experiences of other racialized groups. Specifically connected to analyzing the history of student affairs, I incorporate Tribal Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory, and Asian Critical Race Theory to provide additional ways

to interrogate the centrality of European whiteness in the profession's development.

Gender and Sexuality¹

Feminist Theories. Feminist theories provide critical approaches to highlighting and interrogating gendered aspects of knowledge construction and narratives such as history. Although more prominent than racial dimensions of history, gender is another aspect of student affairs history that is given a superficial treatment. How did issues of gender performance exist for women on campus—as students and professionals? Whose development was, and is, centered and affirmed through pervasive use of student development theory? Continuing the challenge to decenter white experiences, what were the experiences of student and professional women of color in US American Higher education and student affairs? Incorporating feminist theories, I conclude that the history of student affairs provides a history of women in higher education that is told only in comparison to the experience of men on campus further supporting the patriarchal perspectives pervasive in higher education.

Critical Trans*Politics and Queer Theory. I offer critical trans*politics as an important theoretical lens to incorporate into the history of student affairs in order to trouble pervasive cissexism and trans oppression. For example, how did white, European ideals of gender identity influence the development of U.S. American Higher Education, such as the development of separate professional organizations for deans of men and deans of women? Further, queer theory scholarship explicitly takes up the construction of normalcy seeking to trouble, deconstruct, and queer what dominant societal perspectives identify as normal. I hold that queer theory is one option for unraveling reliance on socially constructed binaries and ideals of normalcy within student affairs history. For example, how can queer theory be used to tease out the historical threads of compulsory heteronormativity and cissexism with regards to expectations for normal gender expression and sexual behavior on campus? With no incorporation of queer or trans histories, voices, or experiences, I assert that student affairs history serves to reaffirm performance of cisgender heteronormativity.

Crip Theory

As little attention has been given to the lives of individuals with disabilities, I assert that Crip theory should be incorporated into the history of student affairs to redress privileging of ableism in the profession's development. How would student affairs history be told if centering the experiences of individuals with disabilities? For exam-

¹ Throughout this work, I employ the terms trans and queer lives to encompass individuals who experience oppression, marginalization, and/or violence due to their gender and/or sexuality identity and performance. Stewart and Russell (2014) clarify the use of trans* represents a spectrum of gendered identities that are non-conforming to socially constructed gender binaries while queer speaks to the those whose sexuality and/or gender identities break with dominant societal norms and behavioral expectations.

ple, who were the individuals and activists leading the struggle for legal recognition and access to higher education? What traditions, systems, and structures reflect and support ableism through affirmations of normalcy in ability? By ignoring the complexities of the histories of individuals with disabilities, the history of student affairs reaffirms a history of ableism by positioning abled bodies as the historical norm.

Analyzing the Authors

In addition to the historical content defining the history of student affairs, I also turn to researching the texts' authors to better situate the historical accounts they provide on student affairs history. Indeed, historical accounts do not simply materialize into text; while writing within temporally-situated social systems, authors with biases, positionalities, and their own histories make decisions about how to tell history in a certain way. By drawing conscious attention to the authors, and the systems of knowledge creation they may represent, the perspectives and identities of those telling history cannot fade out of attention into the background. The intention of this section is to highlight the authors as a data set in their own right and to begin asking how common systems and practices of knowledge construction and proliferation highlight certain authors while excluding others.

Taken together, these authors represent a relatively uniform, highly-educated group of student affairs professionals. For example, each author holds terminal degrees, has been employed in either upper-level administrative positions or faculty roles, and has had access to publication outlets such as textbooks. The authors have been able to successfully navigate many levels of schooling through to terminal degrees and gain highly-esteemed employment that other individuals have not. Without personal claims of specific identities by the authors themselves, I hesitate to ascribe any other privileged positions outright. What identities are represented by the set of authors, and which are excluded? To what impact? How are the individual identities of the authors reflected in the biases within student affairs history? What social systems support the appearance of these voices as the curators of student affairs history over or instead of others? How else can the authors be read as a data set that represents the systems influencing how student affairs history is written? How have these authors been selected to write and publish? What con-

clusions can be made about the authorship and publication process within student affairs?

I hold that analyzing the authors as a set makes their identities points of conscious attention in order to illustrate the ways in which individuals serve to represent power structures and systems of dominance in publishing processes. Within this history of the history of student affairs, there are a number of spaces, stories, and voices that have been omitted from the common narrative. The history presented in student affairs preparatory textbooks reflects the identities privileged by those systems directing the development and publication of content while positioning other narratives as exceptions. How might critical student affairs authors pushback against traditional publishing processes? Where are the publishing spaces for historically silenced perspectives? It is incumbent upon current student affairs professionals to consider the ways we need to reframe and retell student affairs history to better prepare future student affairs practitioners with a critical, nuanced understanding of the field's history.

Implications and Future Directions

A critical analysis of the history of the history of student affairs yields a number of implications and future considerations. I focus on implications for three areas of student affairs practice: future professionals enrolled in graduate programs; current faculty members and student affairs professionals; and national professional organizations. First, the history of student affairs presented in graduate textbooks follows a common, fixed narrative that pays minimal attention to diverse voices. Lacking a contextualized, critical perspective of history, graduate students in student affairs preparatory programs are not receiving divergent, marginalized perspectives on the history of US higher education and student affairs. Graduates are then entering the field of student affairs without exposure to



Image by Natalie Battaglia

how systems of power have operated historically for or against various student populations.

The Student Affairs History Project (Coomes, 2006) may provide an alternative presentation of student affairs history for student affairs preparatory programs. Rather than the static nature of a textbook, the Student Affairs History Project is a digital repository for a variety of sources to support historical research. With finding guides and a variety of contributors, graduate students could be encouraged to explore the site for areas of interest, omissions, or places of critique to construct individual historical narratives that challenge or resist the grand narratives of student affairs history's past to revision the field's future. For students already enrolled in graduate preparatory programs that did not present a critical student affairs history, they can seek out texts that are more critical of the history of US American education such as *Schooled to order: A social history of public schooling in the United States* (Nasaw, 1979) or *Ebony and Ivy: Race, slavery, and the troubled history of America's universities* (Wilder, 2013).

In addition to the students who are not receiving critical historical content in preparatory graduate programs, a critical analysis of student affairs history has valuable implications for current student affairs faculty and staff members. First, current student affairs faculty and staff members should consider how to incorporate previously neglected perspectives on the history of higher education and student affairs. One option would be to adopt a practice of bricolage in constructing student affairs history. Bricolage seeks to break traditional disciplinary boundaries of knowledge and research by incorporating tools from diverse, distinct, and creative perspectives (Denzin, 2010; Steinberg & Canella, 2010). Through an approach of bricolage, faculty and staff could include sources from outside the student affairs canon that interrupt the homogenous narrative of student affairs history included in student affairs textbooks.

In addition to bricolage, faculty can adopt critical pedagogical methods. Critical pedagogy is a critical orientation to education that is curious about and attentive to dynamics of dominance and oppression that seeks to develop more equitable alternatives through critical consciousness (Freire, 1993). Due to its analytical focus, critical pedagogy is one way to actively resist hegemonic, oppressive histories. Even while providing direct criticism of the institution of education, including history, critical pedagogy also incorporates a commitment to hope for change that minimizes human pain. Critical pedagogy also becomes an ethical orientation for future practice that proactively considers potential impacts of educational practice.

Incorporating critical pedagogy into the history of student affairs is one possibility for identifying and resisting hegemonic historical accounts of the profession's development while also committing to developing alternative

narratives. Within the field of student affairs, faculty can engage critical pedagogy as a method to develop professional histories that are fluid, inclusive, and concerned with alleviating erasure and marginalization. As a component of critical pedagogy, postmodern curriculum development represents one way to enact critical pedagogy in analyzing, constructing, and teaching the history of student affairs.

In alignment with critical pedagogy's aims, faculty should incorporate postmodern curriculum development into curriculum regarding student affairs history. Postmodern curriculum employs an intentionally political, justice-oriented paradigm in understanding the role of curriculum, which can be applied to developing curriculum about the history of student affairs. Postmodern curriculum additionally recognizes curriculum as more than neutral facts disconnected from students' lives. In postmodern curriculum approaches, traditional knowledge is distinguished from embodied, autobiographical experiences as sources of knowledge with links to larger curriculum concepts.

Taking a postmodern approach, how might student affairs history unfold through the students in student affairs preparation programs rather than simply starting in a decontextualized past moving forward? By affirming the unique experiences of individual perspectives traditionally left out of student affairs history, focusing on the autobiographical as a place of knowledge and interpretation pushes against curriculum that defers to privileged perspectives of Euro-centric white history. Postmodern curriculum weaves the personal into the global by highlighting the interconnectivity between individuals' lives and the world around us. By using a variety of tools and perspectives, critical pedagogues addressing the history of student affairs can act as bricoleurs to develop curriculum that is multifaceted, open to complexities and tensions, and highlights historically and socially silenced perspectives in the field.

Finally, a critical analysis of student affairs history has implications for student affairs national professional associations. Student affairs practitioners' major professional organizations, ACPA and NASPA, have played prominent roles in situating the profession since their organization beginnings. As such, ACPA and NASPA are in prominent places to push for critical changes in student affairs history. These organizations could leverage their organizational outreach to support more critical perspectives on student affairs history. Additionally, ACPA and NASPA could connect with historians working in other professional organizations such as the Association for the Study of Higher Education, ASHE, to co-construct new historical narratives that speak to multiple vantage points, give attention to issues of dominance and oppression, and incorporate previously disregarded stories.