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Beyond Law And Policy: Reaffirming The Role Of Student Affairs

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No Abstract

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EDITORS' NOTES

Student affairs administrators have found their time increasingly occupied by risk management (translated as avoidance of litigation), compliance reviews (read creation of a paper trail), and assessment measures (read accountability). In such efforts, institutions of higher education, already short of resources, have been forced to deal with the legal or liability aspects of the college experience while ignoring or significantly reducing their attention to the substantial opportunities for exploring ethical and developmental issues that underlie the undergraduate experience.

Every issue does not lend itself to easy resolution through resorting to standard rules or procedures. Every wrong in the society is not guaranteed a redress through reference to authority. Yet we teach, administer, and act in higher education as though such rules might exist, as though our actions might profitably be determined by what is or is not clearly written in policy or law. We may yet arrive at a consensus that what is most valuable to our work as administrators and educators is not found alone in policy or law but in wisdom and discretion that may be gained only in part from a more rational or ethical process.

Over the past thirty years, a cumulative body of case law, legislative enactments, and administrative regulations has resulted in a policy-driven agenda in higher education. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in the relationships between students and their institutions; no administrative group stands more clearly in the center of these developments than the traditional advocates for student

concerns, the student affairs practitioners. Whereas a veritable cottage industry of legal advice publications now exists and student development theories and models have continued to evolve, little synthesis of the disparate views represented by legal imperatives and educational best practices has resulted.

At this same moment in our educational history, we have come to concomitant debate on the role and, in some critics' views, the relevance of student affairs in a changing educational environment. A national debate regarding institutional effectiveness, diminished resources, future directions, and present meanings has driven and may in equal measure be driven by the questions of authority, autonomy, and practice inherent in the need for balance between law and educational practice. The purpose of this volume of *New Directions for Student Services* is to examine the apparent overreliance on policy in current student affairs administration and to offer alternatives for future practice.

In Chapter One, Don Gehring reviews the history of federal involvement in educational policy, the current state of the relationship between campuses and external agencies, and the likely implications for the practice of student services administration in the future. John Wesley Lowery, in Chapter Two, examines new directions for creating communities based on mutual principles of justice and personal responsibility. Such community-based movements can satisfy institutional policy concerns through the shaping and enhancement of personal responsibility. In Chapter Three, Liz Baldizan discusses the ever-evolving challenge of dealing with student misconduct in a manner that meets traditional developmental concerns, satisfies the requirements of legal due process, and reduces the risk of litigation. She also traces how we arrived at this state and examines a number of innovative programs that have been proposed for dealing with this issue in a fashion that maximizes outcomes while minimizing the resort to legalistic bureaucracy.

Margaret Healy and Debora Liddell explore how we as student affairs

practitioners can work with students from a development perspective without having legalistic concerns confuse or lessen the effectiveness of the relationship. This difficulty is often compounded by environmental issues such as those presented by the challenges of diversity. In Chapter Five, Mary Howard- Hamilton, Rosemary Phelps, and Vasti Torres explore the issues and difficulties related to the promotion of multiculturalism while maintaining individual rights and freedoms with a college population.

In recent years, our professional organizations have challenged us to think about how we approach our work from a different framework in *Reasonable Expectations* (NASPA) and *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (ACPA). Greg Blimling examines who we are as professionals and the proposed directions we need to take as a profession seeking a more balanced approach to our work. Roger Winston and Sue Saunders then discuss how practitioners need to balance personal and institutional risks with the potential gains for students' education and staff effectiveness within the framework of professional ethical standards. In the concluding chapter, we discuss the critical crossroads at which we find our profession and the profound effect our choices will have on in the future of the academy.

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