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The Final Word

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Dr. Dean M. Batt

January 5, 2001

Dear Vermont Connection friends:

Greetings from sunny South Carolina, where I am taking a brief respite from Vermont winter before returning home for the ski season. The weather is great here; so are the relaxing unscheduled days filled with Jimmy Buffet tunes and fresh seafood dinners. But I presume that in asking me to write this year's The Final Word you weren't looking for a commentary on barefoot beachcombing and the life of a recent retiree from higher education. I presume you'd like me to say a few things based on my 25 years of experience as a chief student affairs officer.

In spite of being retired, I'd rather talk about the future, your future, than the good old days. We live in a world of constant change (a cliché, I know, but bear with me a moment). People can no longer expect to remain for their entire career at the same job for which they prepared as young adults. Even those who stay in one place will have to respond to the evolving marketplace, to keep up with ever-changing conditions and technologies, or else become ineffective. This environment of constant change will affect your own professional careers in many ways.

Some of you may move on to a university with a large population of what used to be called "non-traditional" students: people perhaps older than yourselves coming to college for the first or second or even third time to acquire new skills or pursue long-deferred interests. In meeting the needs of these students you may find yourselves responsible for such things as day care centers or commuter buses.

Others of you may end up at a university with a visionary integrated technology plan. Student affairs needs to be wired into such plans: it must be party to the strategic planning process as well as have appropriate resources provided to residence halls and other student life facilities.

Still others of you may choose to leave higher education altogether, to pursue a human resources career in the private sector, for instance, or start your own e-business. Wherever your career path lies--whether within or outside higher education, in one position or many--I hope you will take advantage of the educational resources available to you now, so that you can manage your future proactively when faced with inevitable change.

Managing change in the workplace is made more challenging when coupled with the fact that higher education is faced with strict limitations on funding. Institutions have to justify themselves to taxpayers, tuition payers, prospective donors and grant providers. Universities compete with each other for students as well as outside funding. Constituencies within each institution are asked to make sacrifices, to do more with less.

One way student affairs professionals can respond to this situation is to work actively with university fundraising and development officers to bring in funding for specific student affairs programs and services. Student affairs professionals should also seek to establish creative partnerships with other university constituencies. They can identify areas of overlapping interest or expertise and set up programs to take advantage of this convergence. Such programs could range from faculty advisors in the residence halls to faculty-brokered career services contacts, to joint outreach programs sponsored by admissions and alumni affairs officers.

Historically Student Affairs divisions have been expected to provide auxiliary services for student-to manage those "non-educational" things that help students be healthier, more well-adjusted and presumably more successful in the classroom. (You see, I couldn't help talking about the past after all!) This is an admirable mission, but in the higher education environment of the future, student affairs professionals will

need to make sure that their responsibilities are not perceived as auxiliary to a university's educational function. Education for life in an era of ongoing change involves much more than mastery of a specific branch of knowledge or training for a career. It requires adaptability, self-knowledge and open-mindedness. Student Affairs has much to offer students in the development of those qualities.

It goes without saying that good educators (including Student Affairs professionals) must cultivate these qualities in *themselves* as well as their students. Managing change in a constantly evolving workplace requires efficient resource management: this includes personal and interpersonal resource as well as inter-office and inter-divisional ones. It is a challenging and exciting time to be a student affairs professional. I wish you well in your endeavors...wherever they lead you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dean M. Batt
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Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management (Retired)
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