Personal & Professional Philosophy Reflection Paper

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SAE 721: Introduction to Student Affairs

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Originally, I thought I had decided to enter into the field of student affairs because I wanted to help transform the lives of students. I was deeply impacted by the student affairs practitioners in my own life and wanted to create that same effect on students that I advised. But, as I gain more experience and develop a deeper understanding of student affairs, I realize that I am entering the profession because I want to be an educator. Unlike the traditional notion of an educator as a teacher who stands in front of the classroom lecturing, passing out syllabi, and grading papers, I want to be an educator outside of just the academic realm. I want to help students learn and develop cognitively, socially, and spiritually.

As a student affairs professional, I intend to have a mentor, educator, and role model relationship with the students I advise. As a mentor, I hope to challenge the students and their organizations to think more critically about the programs they decide to implement and the impact that those programs may have on the people they serve. Also, I hope to create a “bridge” that connects what the students are learning in their classroom to the experiences they are gaining in their co-curricular activities. As an educator, I hope to contribute to the students’ learning experiences by providing a facilitated learning style which promotes reflection and introspection, and ultimately leads to growth and self-authorship. I would also like to serve as a role model. I hope to model the concept of self-authorship through my behavior and ability to present ideas in a manner consistent with students’ perception of me and my perception of myself. In their article, Marcia Baxter Magolda and Peter Magolda (2011) stated that “self-authored student affairs educators who are intellectually curious, lifelong learners, thoughtful and reflective scholar practitioners, and who are able to communicate across difference, are excellent role models for students for who we [sic] desire these same outcomes.” I intend to embody this type of practitioner and hope to serve as an excellent role model for my students.
With my colleagues, I intend to maintain a partner and “challenger” relationship. As a partner, I hope to establish strong relationships among various colleagues, offices, and departments in order to encourage institutional collaboration. I believe that “it is only by acting cooperatively in the context of common goals… that our accumulated understanding about learning is best put to use” (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & NASPA, 1998) and best utilized for student development. I believe it is critical for student affairs professional to make sure that we are establishing cross-institutional relationships to ultimately benefit our students. I also intend to serve as a “challenger” to my colleagues. I hope to challenge them to establish new ways of thinking, to develop new concepts, and to promote cultural awareness and understanding. I also hope that my students will take on this role with their peers as well. Therefore, it is important that I model this behavior because “learning is a social activity, and modeling is one of the most powerful learning tools” (American Association of Higher Education, 1998). Having worked with a few peer groups during my time in this program, I realized the importance of challenging other’s norms. I believe the best ideas often result from conversations that push us outside of our “comfort zone” and typical ways of thinking.

After graduation, I would like to work at a public or private Baccalaureate college (Liberal Arts). I appreciate how students and their development are the central focus of Liberal Arts institutions and I would like to gain more experience in an environment that emphasizes student development. I would then like to get experience in a faith-based institution or historically black college or university (HBCU). I believe with an experience in either type of institution I can understand how to approach student development through a more focused lens
(faith-based or culturally-based). Ultimately, I would like to spend the majority of my career in a public or private, selective, research (doctoral) institution.

I hope to begin my career as an administrator in Student Engagement or New Student Programs. I enjoy working in orientation and am very interested in working either with first-year students or student programming. I then intend to focus more on institutional relationships and student development through providing multiple perspectives. Therefore, I would like to work in a diversity or inclusion office. Next, I intend to go back to school in order to obtain a PhD in Educational Leadership and eventually become Dean of Students in a public or private, selective, research university. I would like to ideally conclude my career as Vice President of Student Affairs and I hope to have a major impact not only on students’ educational experiences but on how educational institutions contribute to student development.

My personal goals throughout my career are; to work at a faith-based institution, to work directly with students in an advising capacity, and to incorporate family as a more integral part of higher education. I hope to work at a faith-based institution because I want to develop an understanding of how faith fuels student development. Also since faith is an integral part of my life, I would like to be able to work in an environment that allows me to contribute to the spiritual development of students as well as their cognitive and social development. I believe my professional strengths manifest themselves when I am in an environment with constant personal interactions. I enjoy the advising aspect of working with students and am interested in being able to see them develop right before my eyes. Also, I think it is crucial for me to work directly with students because, professionally, that experience will help me be an even greater Dean of Students. Additionally, through the work and research that I have done in my Graduate Assistantship, I have realized the important role that families maintain in our students’ lives.
Especially for first-year students or those who may be in the “dualism” phase and continue to rely on “external factors,” families have a major voice in their decision-making process. Therefore, I will personally strive to ensure that orientation and integration of the family into specific aspects of college life remains a priority, throughout my professional career.

Personally, and especially in a professional environment, I value respectful interaction amongst colleagues and with students, integrity in all aspects of the work environment, my faith and personal beliefs, and justice and cultural acceptance. I also believe as a student affairs professional, it is essential, that we have “the ability to access, integrate, and apply multiple sources of knowledge” (Magolda & Magolda, 2011). I intend to be a lifelong learner and I value others who maintain intellectual curiosity.

Since beginning the master’s program for Student Affairs in Higher Education, I have developed a deeper understanding of what the student affairs profession is, what impacts the practice of student affairs, and which role I can play in helping students develop their identity. In the original personal statement I declared that in the future “I hope to use my acquired knowledge and skills to assist in developing the college experience for students” (Garnett, 2012). I had a very vague understanding of what student affairs actually is and how professionals contributed to students’ learning. But through the readings, class discussions, and experiences in my Graduate Assistantship I have cultivated a deeper understanding of what student affairs is and what my philosophy is, regarding the profession. Through class discussions, group presentations, and course readings I have formed a deeper insight into the various types of higher education institutions and how their missions impact the way that they function. Additionally, I have developed an understanding of self authorship and how it relates to my role in educating the
whole student. I am excited to be a part of a profession which recognizes that learning does not happen solely within the classroom.

The idea of transformative learning reinforces the root meaning of liberal education itself – freeing oneself from the constraints of a lack of knowledge. ...the purpose of educational involvement is the evolution of multidimensional identity… cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual development. (NASPA & ACPA, 2008)

I believe learning is compounded, where multiple facets of a person must be developed in order for it to truly occur. I am excited to begin my journey as a student affairs professional and to continue that composite learning process for myself as well as my students.
References


