VACPA THE 8TH VOICE
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Greetings from the Chair

Jack Bauman
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Greetings everyone, the green plague is now upon us! Hopefully, you have taken the time to read the previous issues of the 8th Voice and have learned a lot about what it means to be a member of the VACPA. Our organization is a very unique one in that it brings together people from a variety of disciplines who are all interested in the same thing: helping students.

You may have noticed we have undergone a name change since our last issue. We are now the Virginia Association for Counseling Professionals in Higher Education (VACPHE). We decided to make the change because we felt it better represented our membership, which includes not only counselors but students and new professionals within the field of student affairs. These three groups have been the backbone of our organization since its inception, and the expansion of membership and collaboration with these groups has been a major focus because it is the strength of our membership. On behalf of the entire leadership team, I want to welcome all of our new members, and I want to thank all of our members for their continued support of our organization. We are a young organization, and we need your support to continue our growth and success.

I invite you to visit our website, http://www.vacphe.org/index.html, to learn more about some of the initiatives we are currently working on. Our website is also a great place to find information about upcoming events, and it is a great place to find information throughout the year. I invite you to check them out as they are announced! We are also on Facebook, and we post information about upcoming events there as well.

Finally, I want to thank the members of our leadership team for their hard work. Chair: Caetlin Ott Graduate Students Representative: Kimberly Kirkpatrick

Best regards,

Chair: Jack Bauman
Chair: Caetlin Ott Graduate Students Representative

Sense of Belonging: Not Just for Undergraduate Students

Ashley Mesiburg, *University of Lynchburg*

Being valuable into graduate school at the University of South Carolina and Lynchburg College, I have had the opportunity to work with students in a variety of ways. Suggested accomplishments of my time, I have served as a student affairs intern, a residence hall director, a student affairs assistantship, and a graduate assistant. I have also served as a secondary consultant disputing out of graduate school. Even though I started a graduate assistant, I still feel like I am a student affairs intern.

Through my experiences in graduate school, I have learned the importance of belonging to a well-documented indicator of student success for undergraduate students. Although I have not been a student affairs professional for very long, I have seen the importance of belonging for undergraduate students. I have also seen the importance of belonging for graduate students. Although I have not been a student affairs professional for very long, I have seen the importance of belonging for graduate students. Graduate students are also vulnerable. Graduate students are also vulnerable. Graduate students are also vulnerable

Wilkerson, W. (2002). Chi-Phi-ed companionships: What student affairs administrators consider when screening candidates. Journal of College Student Development, 43(6), 912-920.

Reflective Journaling in Student Affairs

Holly Johnson *University of South Carolina*

When was the last time that you wrote for fun? Chances are, it has been a while if you are a busy student affairs professional. As a new graduate student in higher education, I recently reconnected with an old habit, reflective journaling, which has helped me to navigate challenges with greater clarity and intention as well as has motivated me to provide more attentive care to students. Thus, the purpose of this article is to explore the benefits of reflective journaling as a technique for improving the lives of new student affairs professionals and to provide tips for starting your own reflective journaling habit.

Benefits of Reflective Journaling

Most individuals enter the student affairs profession with a strong sense of purpose about serving others. However, amidst the daily challenges of serving students, it can be easy to lose our sense of agency in our work. As I began my work in student affairs, I often found it difficult to be truly attentive to others on days when I felt emotionally and physically exhausted. When I began to journal on a regular basis, however, I was able to identify ways in which I could avoid depleting myself in my work. For instance, reviewing my past journal entries made it clear that I needed to reach out and ask for my coworkers' help more often in the office. As a result of this practice, I have gained greater motivation and enthusiasm for serving students. Free journaling can also be used as a technique for improving daily mindfulness. By legitimizing thoughts and feelings through the process of writing them down, it becomes easier to respond to challenges and difficult situations. Reflective writing restores our reserves of compassion, enabling us to make more meaningful connections with others.

The reality of working in student affairs leaves little time for professionals to recover and reflect upon the impact of their service. When I began my own graduate studies, I was quickly immersed in the hectic student affairs lifestyle. Rushing through meetings and appointments, I often found myself advising students in a hurried, robotic manner. When I made the commitment to take time for journaling, however, I regained a sense of composure that has allowed me to become more present in my daily activities and service to others. By slowing down and taking the time to journal, I have been inspired to take on daily challenges in a more engaged way that has enhanced both my outlook and my productivity.

When I first started journaling, it was quite gratifying to vent my feelings about the challenges of my day. My entries were often filled with worries about future problems and events that did not go according to plan. When I revisited these entries weeks after the fact, I was shocked to see how journaling had changed my mindset since that time. These old journal entries helped me remember that many of life's daily difficulties are fleeting in nature and not worth obsessing over. The process of writing and reflecting upon events helped me to gain perspective about my challenges, enabling me to make empowered decisions in the days ahead. Written reflection forces us to adopt a wider understanding about the impact of our behavior. This practice helps to distance us from our troubles, while reconnecting us to our values. In focused contemplation, we craft a philosophy for living that will grow and evolve as we do.

Getting Started

It is actually much easier to adopt a writing routine than one might think. The first step to cultivating a journaling practice is to create an environment that supports the writing habit. For me, recording my thoughts at my desk during my work break is a ritual that has proved to be both convenient and rewarding. Plant your journal and writing materials in any quiet place where you habitually find yourself. Schedule a time for reflection that you can look forward to every day. When you start writing, see the journal as a space free from judgment and self-editing, and let your ideas flow. Letting go of perfectionism is the most important step toward developing a meaningful writing practice. For more information about getting started with journaling, check out these resources:

- Ideas for unconventional reflection: http://www.amazon.com/Wreck-This-Journal-Keri-Smith/dp/039953346X
- A blog describing one year of daily journaling: http://ayeartoinspire.blogspot.co.uk/
- Prompts for journaling: http://www.creative-writing-now.com/journal-prompts.html

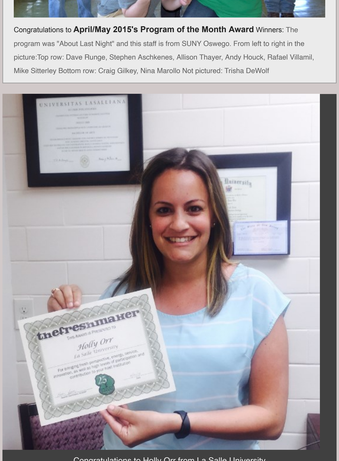
Devoting even a small amount of time to writing in your journal each day can dramatically improve your quality of life. Any act of reflection, however small, will encourage habits of mind that will benefit you in many ways. So, start writing today!

CGSNP Program of the Month Winners

Here are some past winners the Coalition for Graduate Students and New Professionals (SCGSNP) have chosen to recognize outstanding programs created/coordinated by graduate students and/or new professionals that have been innovative, impactful, or unique to its institution and/or the field of Student Affairs. These are our past winners from last semester:

Congratulations to Jan/Feb's Program of the Month Award Pictured here from left to right is: Steven Evens, Max Mattern, Brandi McGhee (top row) and Dashari Kearse, Rachel Lowe, Kerrie Montgomery, Stacie Schultz (bottom row). All from University of Florida for their Greater Gator Conference program.

Congratulations to **April/May 2015's Program of the Month Award** Winners: The program was "About Last Night" and this staff is from SUNY Oswego. From left to right in the picture:Top row: Dave Runge, Stephen Aschkenes, Allison Thayer, Andy Houck, Rafael Villamil, Mike Sitterley Bottom row: Craig Gilkey, Nina Marollo Not pictured: Trisha DeWolf



Congratulations to Holly Orr from La Salle University
our Freshmaker Award Winner from the May!

YOU'RE writing it? WE want to feature it! CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The 8th Vector is a Newsletter sponsored by the Coalition for Graduate Students and New Professionals within ACPA. The 8th Vector is a wonderful resource to our members as it shares with fellow Student Affairs professionals trending topics and best practices. As student affairs professionals, we know that there are a vast array of topics that articles can be written about, articles typically relate to:

- **Lessons Learned** - Centered on experiences of transformational learning in relation to being a new professional or graduate student
- **Trends and Best Practices** - Reveals current trends or practices that new professionals or graduate students are embarking on
- **Research** - Focuses on innovative research occurring in the field
- **"Dear Colleague"** - This session will be modeled after the infamous "Dear Abbey" section of the newspaper. If you volunteer for this session, you will answer a hypothetical question of your choice in the hopes to share insight and advice.
- **CGSNP Spotlight** – Serves as an opportunity for CGSNP members and/or initiatives to be highlighted
- **Alumni Corner** - Know an Alumni of CGSNP? How about interview them and write an article about it?
- **ACPA Commission/Committee Spotlight**: This portion will serve to inform on the initiatives that fellow ACPA Commissions and Committees are embarking on.

Authors of 8th Vector articles include: current graduate students and new professionals, experienced professionals, as well as CGSNP directorate members. Thus, all are welcomed to submit an article! Past issues of the 8th Vector can be reviewed here: http://www.myacpa.org/scgsnp/newsletters.
You can email your submission to 8thvector@gmail.com!

If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for The 8th Vector, please don't hesitate to contact one of your 8th Vector Editors: **Michelle Leeper Ward** (leeperward@gmail.com) and **Davona Mason** (dmason@mail.bw.edu).

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ACPA College Student Educators International
COALITION FOR GRAD STUDENTS AND NEW PROFESSIONALS
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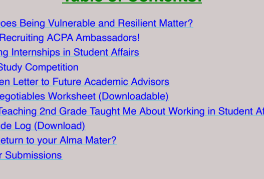

Why Does Being Vulnerable and Resilient Matter?

Danielle Coffman *Florida Atlantic University*

"The process of rising strong is to rise from our falls, overcome our mistakes, and face hurt in a way that brings more wisdom and wholeheartedness into our lives" (Brown, 2015, p. 40). As young student affairs professionals, we sometimes make mistakes and we have to remind ourselves that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. Brené Brown (2015), in her book Rising Strong, shares important messages to help deal with the inevitable setbacks life throws at us. The purpose of this article is to highlight three messages from Rising Strong that can help young Student Affairs professionals be more vulnerable and resilient.

In order for us to connect with others, we need to be vulnerable. Being vulnerable in Student Affairs is to admit to our mistakes and learn from them in a healthy and productive manner. However, vulnerability is scary and many people are numb to it and don't want to feel the pain or discomfort that revolves around being vulnerable (Brown, 2010). As Student Affairs professionals, we deal with failures, either our own or those of our students every day. We need to be good role models for our students by sharing our mistakes and by seeking to improve and learn from our past. "Failure can be nourishment if we are willing to get curious, show up vulnerable and human, and living out rising strong into practice" (Brown, 2015, p. 314). Having honest and vulnerable conversations with co-workers and students will open up a welcoming conversation where we can be real with each other and build trust with one another. After all, Brown (2015, p. 213) reminds us, "People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability and tell the truth about their stories are the real badasses." By sharing our journeys with students, we create bonds of shared humanness with others and serve as positive role models for dealing with the inevitable curve balls that life throws us.

Brown (2015) finds that one of the biggest obstacles to living wholeheartedly is comparing ourselves to others. Comparison can leave us feeling inferior and inadequate and often sucks the creativity and joy out of life. Brown suggests employing two completely counterintuitive strategies for getting ourselves out of the comparison game. The two strategies: talking to ourselves in the same way we'd talk to someone we love and reaching out to someone we trust (Brown, 2015).

Resilience is being able to recover from a situation that you had little to no control over. "Rising strong after a fall is how we cultivate wholeheartedness in our lives; it's the process that teaches us most about who we are" (Brown, 2015, p. xvii). Being adaptable and flexible as life throws you curve balls is important. Focusing on the things you have control over instead of worrying about the things that you cannot control allows you to bounce back from adversity (Covey, 2004).

In conclusion, vulnerability and resilience are keys to creativity and wholehearted living (Brown, 2015). By being vulnerable, we will understand ourselves better and be more patient and kind towards others. "When you practice empathy and compassion with someone, there is not less of these qualities to go around. There is more. Love is the last thing we need to ration in this world" (Brown, 2015, p. 9). Vulnerability takes courage to open up who you are to others and to be prepared to be either accepted or rejected. Resilience will help you deal with the rejection and become even better. Rising Strong is not just the name of the book – it is what we need to do every day as Student Affairs professionals.

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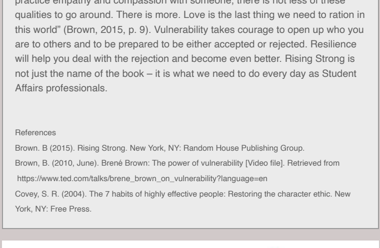

Creating Internships in Student Affairs

Paige Hellman *University of South Carolina*

I remember the day I learned that I could actually develop college students as a career. As a sophomore at Texas A&M University, I had chosen communication as my major partially because I could write and speak well, but primarily because I was stumbling down the path towards my future with no clear direction, and communication was a broad major that offered me transferable skills. When my mother sat me down and told me I needed to get serious about figuring out my life, she posed one simple question to me: "What are you passionate about?" The only thing that I could tell her was that I was passionate about Fish Camp, Texas A&M's extended orientation program that I dedicated much of my time and energy to over my four years of college. I did not realize it at the time, but what I was actually passionate about was not the organization itself. Instead, my passion was for the development of college students that Fish Camp facilitated, of which I was both a benefactor and recipient. Thus, my desire and plan to become a Student Affairs professional was born. But I faced one gaping hole in my grand plan: how was I going to get experience in this field, and who was going to help me gain that experience?

This hole quickly replaced my relief at discovering my life's mission with anxiety of the unknown. While my friends around me were quickly racking up internships in marketing, engineering, and management, ensuring their success in the job market, as far as I could tell, there were very few, if any, opportunities for me to gain experience in Student Affairs as an undergraduate student other than simply being a leader in an organization. And so we have come to the gaping hole in Student Affairs: Why do we expect students in essentially every other academic area to have undergraduate practical experience in their field, but do not provide opportunities for potential Student Affairs professionals to do so until graduate school? I think it's time to start closing that gap by providing long-term mutually beneficial opportunities for those aiming to invest their future in Student Affairs.

I was one of the lucky few who, by way of good timing and good connections, found a way to gain practical Student Affairs experience as an undergraduate. My mentor and former supervisor, Michael Shehane of the Texas A&M Career Center, had the foresight six years ago to craft a position in which he selected one undergraduate student per year who had expressed an interest in Student Affairs. This student, called a "Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) Intern," would co-advise a Career Center student organization called Aggie Career Team alongside him, specifically developing and investing in the President and Executive Vice-President of the organization while also working as a part-time Career Center employee, aiding students in working towards their career goals (Shehane, 2015). The learning outcomes of this position are directly based on the ACPA/NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners and include "advising and helping," "assessment," "diversity and inclusion," "human and organizational resources," "leadership," and "student learning and development" (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). This position, which I held for a year, is the reason that I feel that I am excelling in my graduate assistantship today and am growing a poised, thoughtful professional, and I am grateful. But I do have to wonder how those feel who did not receive the type of opportunity that I did. Isn't there a way that we can create more internships like mine?

In this situation, the benefits of offering undergraduate internships in Student Affairs are numerous for a vast network of those involved. If you choose to begin implementing this idea by creating a position for an undergraduate student affairs practitioner hopeful, it will benefit you by giving you supervisory experience that is a little less high-stakes than supervising a graduate assistant while also reducing your workload. It of course benefits the student in question by giving them a head start in their field: experience directly advising students, gaining a feel for what a graduate assistantship might feel like, and gaining both confidence and competence, both required qualities for success in this field. Additionally, if we consider the idea that "between 50% and 60% of new professionals leave the field before their fifth year" (Renn, K. & Hodges, J. 2007, p. 370), it seems prudent to provide undergraduate students with hands-on experience so that they have the opportunity to change their minds before committing to a two-year graduate program if they so choose. If we look a bit more down the road, allowing students to gain student affairs experience at the undergraduate level will benefit the higher education program and offices seeking to offer graduate assistantships in tandem by providing a better, more competent group of applicants. The benefits are numerous. So who should take responsibility for creating undergraduate positions that bring these benefits?

To both close this gaping hole in Student Affairs and to capitalize on these benefits, I believe that it is not on the university as a whole, but on us as young professionals, whether we are in that position now or will soon be leaving the safety of graduate school to progress to a new professional position. We are not so far removed; we remember the difficulties of transitioning from student leader to student advisor; we should be taking steps to ease that transition for others. In their article "Crafting an Undergraduate Student Affairs Internship" published in NACA's Campus Activities Programming magazine, Esposito, Meyer, and Sansone (2015) wrote, "While many current student affairs professionals trace their careers to undergraduate involvement (e.g. clubs and activities), those experiences in and of themselves are not specifically designed to produce student affairs employees…If more institutions create these internship opportunities, the answers to the question 'How did you get into this kind of work?' may transition from stories of happenstance and luck to recollections of outstanding undergraduate experiential activities" (p. 30). It's on us, fellow professionals. No matter where we are in our careers, and no matter where we are headed, it is important for us to consider that the future of this field is directly in our hands, and we have the power to make it better. Let us all consider creating opportunities for undergraduates to dip their toes into student affairs, so that even when we have long since moved on, we are certain that we are leaving the field in capable, experienced, confident, and passionate hands.

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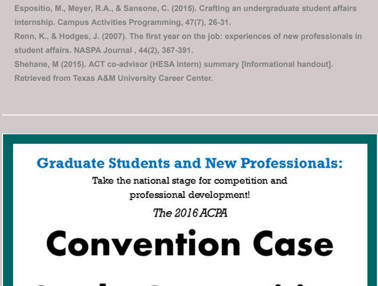


An Open Letter to Future Academic Advisors

Ana Nye *Drexel University*

Originally featured on Higher Ed Geek! Click the link to check out the original post and Higher Ed Geek: http://www.higheredgeek.com/blog/an-open-letter-to-future-academic-advisors

Dear Fellow Newbies,

I had a very visceral "Lean In" type of moment with myself a few weeks ago. Having just received a promotion and in the midst of launching head first into conference season, I began to wonder whether or not I should request an update to my business cards. I still had about 300 left with my previous title having only started my job a year ago, but I felt this deep-seeded urge to say to the world "Hey I worked hard, I earned something, and you all should know!" But then that creeping, obnoxious little voice in your head, the same one that tells you that maybe you're not entitled to an opinion at so-and-so meeting, said loud and clear "Whoa there lady, who do you think you are? Don't be a show-off. Don't make noise because you're already pushing your luck." But then the spirit of Sheryl Sandberg whispered in my ear and said "Hey stop that! Claim your new title. Get some coffee, too" and all was right with the world again.

That issue that we all face sometimes, feeling "like a fraud" in your job, because you are brand new to a position, or too young, or too inexperienced…maybe that never goes away. One thing is for sure, however, that if we let that voice get too loud, we can keep ourselves from really making a difference in the places that we work. As graduate students and new professionals, we sometimes need to remind ourselves that we are more than capable. We can be great educators and show everyone that we understand the complexities of the field, can apply our training, and really discuss the big issues higher education is facing today.

Sitting in a room of soon-to-be graduates excited about their upcoming post-graduation adventures is a great re-energizer. This time of year is always tough to get through---between the grim weather and the post-holiday lull (and for me, the pacing of a quarter school like Drexel), life seems to be sucked out of you on a daily basis. "You are here for them", a mantra muttered under one's breath regularly when speaker contracts, committee meetings, and purchasing card reconciliation bog down the day-to-day. It's a reminder that we are in a unique position with a heavy responsibility – as mentors, teachers, soundboards for future aspirations—operating in a very strange hybrid world in which our students must navigate intellectual pursuits, identity development, and financial and personal hardship all at the same time. So then how can we become better allies to our students (in all senses of the word)? How do we move the profession forward in order to make sure that 10, 15, 20 years from now we still have the privilege of getting to do this job?

I think it comes down to that educator's mantra…you know the one, that phrase that's haunted your subconscious since Student Affairs 101: theory to practice, theory to practice, theory to practice. I refuse to believe that I was the only one that had nightmares about this…"Dear Ed.M. student, we will send your Master's degree in the mail once we receive visual confirmation that the words 'Theory to Practice' have been tattooed to your face" Etc., etc. Before the big kid money, when 'the job search' was an ever-present cloud looming over your head and you spent your days figuring out if it was actually possible to buy gas using only nickels, at least one chunk of your day--every day in fact--was devoted to theories and readings and readings and theories. Magolda and Chickering and Dewey, oh my! You remember, when you were at the height of paper-writing hysteria, you started wondering things like whether you should get a "Challenge and Support" t-shirt made and hey, maybe faculty would be more generous with your grades if you wore it to class once in a while.

Two years into the field I have slowly come to realize that the kind of developmental and educational psychology foundation we received has been extremely critical in becoming an effective educator, especially when the tough cookie (you know the one) knocks on your door hoping for some direction. When I think back, however, I realize that for whatever reason I didn't make it a point to do the deep dive with theory as applied to academic advising, the role I had always seen myself taking on later. Student Life, Residential Living…those were always the coursework's main focuses it seemed, with the nuances of career and academic advising as peripheral inquiries if we had the energy between writing papers and working our assistantships. Or maybe at that point I just lacked the insight (and time) to analyze the intersectionality of student development theories and the specific realm of advising I find myself in today.

After picking up a copy of NACADA's Academic Advising Approaches (2013) to prepare for a number of academic program interviews, I discovered two new friends that somehow captured in neat(ish) models the spirit of student mentorship I had always strived for: Socratic Advising and Advising as Teaching. Socratic advising involves the use of reflective exercises such as journaling and goal setting. Advisors facilitate lines of questioning that encourage students to think about the logic behind their decision-making. If you've ever had a student say that wanted to be an engineer but then share that they were not "a fan of doing math" you'll see why this is a useful tool. Advising as teaching posits the idea that you are in fact a complete educator, with the ability to provide the student an experience similar to what they would get in a regular classroom setting (and I would dare say, better). You get to know your students and their academic strengths and challenges. Advising sessions have learning goals, action plans, and follow-ups and, for the really ambitious, you might even create an advising syllabus at the beginning of the academic year to really frame the expectations for the relationship and the purpose of your future meetings. Both of these models pull from the many student development theories we've learned and can be used to help you impact the student experience in positive ways—which is always the goal at the end of the day, isn't it? *(More on these two models if you happen to be interested in seeing my session 'Perspectives on Socratic Advising and Advising as Teaching for New Professionals' taking place at ACPA 2016 on March 7th in Montreal)*

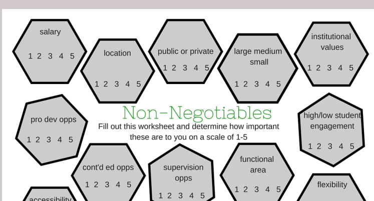
All of this comes down to a very important question—So What? Who cares? Is this a valuable thing to think about? Faculty mentors wrote this question all over my culminating thesis drafts and these days I scribble it on feedback for my students' work regularly. Even as graduate students and new professionals at the bright beginnings of long careers in education, we should take the time right now to probe these questions and think about the "big picture." Why are student advisors important? Why should we care that institutions place value on our roles? In an era when all types of organizations are making the sprint towards faceless digital processes, where do professionals like us fall? Some think that the every day transactional aspects of our jobs as academic advisors (overrides for course restrictions, degree clearance, etc.) are the only things we do. Proponents of the "cutting the fat" (aka 'There are too many administrators!') strategy of revamping higher education think that one day we could all be replaced by cheaper, more efficient "robots" (software) that can give students exactly what they want and the answers they need when they want it. And if that's really how people feel, those with power and influence anyway, that could spell big trouble for our jobs in the future.

But that's the problem, isn't it? The road to helping students develop into ambitious, well-adjusted, and resilient individuals is not about handing over easy answers. Although their words and actions sometimes don't provide great evidence to the fact, our students are adults that need to learn how to trail blaze. With that said, tossing 18-year olds into the proverbial deep-end isn't necessarily the best idea either. For many, college is the first opportunity they have ever had to explore new terrain without the every day guidance of guardians or the comfort of familiar communities. To be clear, I'm not advocating for a full-scale return of in loco parentis by any means, but there has to be a balance—a sweet spot—somewhere between being Mother Duck and feeling like you staff a customer service desk. That is where a well-trained, patient, compassionate educator comes in: armed with common sense and a handy network of campus resources, as well as confidence in their ability to use their own education. An advisor has critical influence. The most successful seniors will tell you that a great someone was in their corner, asking the right questions, proofreading applications to graduate school, conducting mock interviews, introducing them to this amazing dean or that brilliant professor, and always having a box of tissues ready for the really rough patches.

"The higher education landscape is changing" is a very buzz-wordy thing to say these days—maybe the more compelling reminders are that budgets are getting cut, people are being laid off, and accreditation bodies (scary) and parents (scarier) are in a constant hovering state. So how do we approach the future of our field, all things considered? At minimum, be comfortable talking about these issues early in your career, be proud of your training, continue to develop it, and advocate for your profession as a critical part of a student's ability to thrive. With many answers still blurry, one thing at the very least seems crystal clear: if we see ourselves (and allow our directors and deans and provosts to see us) as simply walking and talking degree auditing software, we won't be here for much longer. That scares the heck out of me because I have a fantastic job working with some of the smartest and most daring young people I have ever met. Not to mention, I also really dig my new business cards.

Sincerely,

Also Still a Newb



Job Search season consuming you? Have you determined your non-negotiables? What are you not willing to budge on and how important are these to you? Use this worksheet to help!

NonNegotiables Worksheet Download

What Teaching 2nd Grade Taught Me About Working in Student Affairs

C. Scott McDonald *University of South Carolina*

Master's degree students in Higher Education and Student Affairs programs come from a wide variety of undergraduate majors and leadership experiences, which means we all come to the field with different academic backgrounds and perspectives on how to best work with students. These differences provide ample opportunities for us to learn from each other inside and outside of our graduate classes. As an Elementary Education major I did my student teaching during my final semester of college. Although the hours were long and my to do list was seemingly endless, student teaching taught me more about working effectively in Higher Education than I could have ever imagined. The purpose of this paper is to share the three most important things I learned from student-teaching second graders: always have a plan, never leave home without a back-up plan, and be vigilant for learning opportunities.

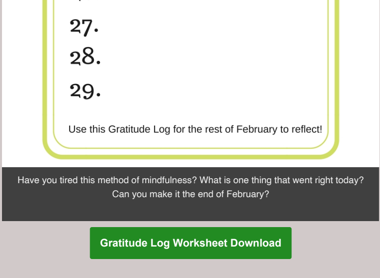
We all recognize the importance of having a plan for achieving our goals, but when working with 2nd graders it is an absolute must. It is an awesome responsibility to be in charge of helping 2nd graders be able to read at a 3rd grade level by the end of the year. I learned that to achieve this goal, I couldn't just focus on the end goal of reading at a 3rd grade level. I had to create sub-goals for the end of the quarter, month, week, day, and even for each individual lesson to meet the larger end goal. I constantly updated my daily plan to ensure that everyone in my class would be able to read at a 3rd grade level.

Similarly, I have found that breaking down goals into manageable sub-goals has helped me to teach college students how to break down their long-term goal of graduating from college into short-term, achievable goals. We need to help students to create ambitious goals, but also help them create small, daily goals that will lead to the completion of their large goals. We can help students map their plan for success in the here and now which will lead to completing their degree.

In 14 weeks as a student teacher, not one day went exactly as I had imagined when I created my detailed lesson plan. Developing contingency plans on the fly quickly became necessary to optimize student success. Despite school assemblies, snow days, and other unexpected surprises that arose throughout the day, I still was responsible for preparing my students to read at the 3rd grade level. I had to make some tough choices on what content to teach when there was an unexpected early dismissal. Staying calm under pressure helped me to stay focused on figuring out creative ways to ensure that my students continued to learn and make progress. This ability to be calm under pressure has subsequently helped me to balance my work, practicum, and graduate school responsibilities as an aspiring higher education administrator. Staying focused on my goals has helped me to devise creative solutions to the unexpected situations that have arisen.

Teaching second graders also taught me to be in the moment and to take advantage of learning opportunities as they arose. For example, one day I was teaching a Math lesson when it started to snow. I spontaneously decided to have the students put on their jackets and grab their magnifying glasses because it was a unique opportunity to learn about snow and the stages of matter. Though science was not in the lesson plans that day, it didn't snow often in our area, so we had to take advantage of the opportunity for the students to learn a lesson first-hand about how matter changes forms. In our day-to-day interactions with our students, college or elementary, we need to always be open to taking advantage of unexpected learning opportunities that present themselves. Occasionally taking time to discuss hot campus, national, or international issues can benefit student learning in ways that only strictly focusing on predetermined learning outcomes cannot.

In summary, teaching second graders taught me the importance of planning, being flexible, and making the most of every minute and every learning opportunity. No matter what their age, if the right learning environment is created, our students can achieve more than we ever thought possible. I have found that my experience teaching 2nd graders has made me a better student affairs professional. By applying the same principles that help 2nd graders learn, student affairs professionals can empower college students to achieve their full potentials.



Have you tired this method of mindfulness? What is one thing that went right today? Can you make it the end of February?

Gratitude Log Worksheet Download

Why Return to Your Alma Mater?

Positives Negatives and Advice for Those Inquiring

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I could not stop asking her questions. My orientation leader, Shelly Pensworth, kicks off her shoes, clicks over to the next slide, and comfortably crosses her feet onto the table in the front of the room. "I want to do what she does," I thought to myself. Greek life, student government, pieces of advice for freshmen year... the orientation presentation had me on the edge of my seat, wide-eyed and dreaming of my future at Mississippi State. Two years later, I sat atop the table at the front of the room, with my feet crossed, throwing out candy to students who answered the questions I presented from my orientation slides. I saw extreme potential in these students who were fresh out of high school.

Throughout the next few years, seeing my orientation students take on leadership roles and following my advice about involvement gave me butterflies. One became Miss Mississippi State University, another is the president of his fraternity, and one even campaigned to become the student government president. As a nineteen year old without a declared major, I desired to somehow have this same butterfly feeling for the rest of my life, but how? Mississippi State was almost like a person to me. It offered me growth, responsibility, an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, and busy professionals who stopped on the middle of the drill field to ask "Miss Taylor King! What has been going on in your world?" I could never give back as much as Mississippi State has given to me. Do other people feel this same way? After realizing that student affairs was an actual profession during my junior and senior year, I decided to look more into it. I took a fifth year, or what I like to call a victory lap, where I had intentional conversations with various student affairs professionals about the path they took to be where they are now. One woman I looked up to who worked in student government and Greek life mentioned to me that at her graduate institution, the University of South Carolina, I could "co-teach a university class for first-year students, learn from pioneers in first-year experience, and take day trips to Charleston with my friends." Sold! My application was sent, and here I am!

When I first arrived here in Columbia, my heart strings still pulling from Mississippi, a question loomed on my mind, and I asked it quite frequently. "Do HESA students graduate then return to their alma mater? Why wouldn't they? Isn't that where they fell in love with student affairs? Don't they feel like they need to give back to what gave so much to them?" I received an array of answers. To my surprise, most people said that HESA graduates tend to take on job opportunities at institutions that they were not previously familiar with. This was such a surprise to me; going back to Mississippi State has seemed like a no-brainer. I already know and love the culture, I have relationships with undergraduates and staff that will still be there if I were to return after graduation, and I still have so so much to give back! Gergely conducted a study in 2014 that assessed the reasons why student affairs chose the field. In his thesis, he states, *In most cases, there is no single person, position, or experience that had the greatest influence on why a student affairs professional chose the profession. It is a collection of experiences, over multiple years, varying from person to person, that creates a spark which ignites the passion and drive to pursue a career in Student Affairs...The influences on the decision to choose Student Affairs as a career path includes undergraduate involvement, interactions with student affairs professionals, supervisory roles, collaboration, and connections.* (p. 33)

As the development of a student affairs professional rounds out to graduation, they have a decision to make about where they wish to work. There are a wide array of different routes, paths, and possibilities when it comes to the student affairs professional's experience with their alma mater. They may attend the institution for undergraduate studies, and then decide to stay for graduate school. They may choose another institution for graduate school then return immediately upon graduation. They may decide to return years or decades later. They may fall in love with another institution and never return to work. There are endless possible scenarios.

The Advantages of Working for your Alma Mater

When reflecting upon the possibility of working for one's alma mater, many benefits and challenges come to mind. First, it may be easier to land a great job at an institution who already knows your name and your talents. Also, it is fulfilling to give back to an institution that has given you amazing learning and growing experiences. You may feel more confident and oriented working at an institution where you already feel well-connected. Knowledge of your leadership experiences in undergrad may allow you to move higher in the ranks faster than if you were to work elsewhere. You are able to reconnect with your mentors who will give you advice and comfort. You know for the most part what your institution is doing, so you may be able to make strides toward new innovations and ideas.

Possible Challenges when Working at Your Alma Mater

Although there are rewards, working for your alma mater brings challenging experiences as well. The first negative is facing the difference between being a student leader and being a student affairs professional. Being a student leader has rewards: climbing the social latter, becoming a member of the popular and selective campus organizations, being nominated or voted onto homecoming court, creating relationships with big name students, faculty, and staff, and having the "power" to make big campus decisions for students. Not many of these attributes and rewards transfer over from student leader to student affairs professional. Yes, you may still get recognition for good work, you can still pioneer a new organization, you can still make connections with "big names," but the charms of undergraduate life of popularity amongst thousands of peers isn't quite the same story of those above-and-beyond professionals.

Secondly, the nostalgia of undergrad fades. The heavy velvet curtain has been lifted, and you see that the student affairs world of your institution was not as perfect and peaceful as it seemed through your twenty year old eyes. Your starry eyed view of various professionals and offices may become marred when you hear of vices and dissensions within the institution. The glorious times of conversations in the student union now turn into the not-so-light-hearted union where tough meetings take place. Once a prankster, now busting the pranksters. Your beloved friends have moved away, so a trip to the Greek houses are surely not what they used to be. Buildings will be renovated, roads will be turned into walkways, and your favorite dining hall may be turned into a parking lot. The programs you were involved with may not be as notable as you once imagined. Similar advice is found in an article entitled Working Smartly for Your Alma Mater by K. Maloney. In the article, she states, "Just because you had the perfect experience as a student doesn't necessarily mean your college does things that much better or differently than others. Just because a respected faculty member says her program is cutting-edge doesn't necessarily make it so" (2015). Suddenly you are working with the people who used to advise and control your life in certain ways.

Advice for Working for your Alma Mater

How do you combat these issues as a new professional at the alma mater? I decided to ask this question to a student affairs professional I looked up to in the field. I inquired about his personal experiences, and the joys and challenges that come attached to the decision to return. The professional attained both a bachelor's and master's degree from Mississippi State University and a doctorate from the University of Mississippi. He has held seventeen different job titles within his thirty seven years at Mississippi State. He answered my phone call with "precious Taylor! Tell me all about how you're doing!" The advice I have gotten from him and many other professionals is as follows. First of all, make sure you do not 'hang out' with students except in appropriate settings. My interviewee pointed out that while he was a twenty two year old residence hall director, the students he managed were only a few years younger than him. Some of them he knew in undergrad or were younger

siblings of friends. “It is better to be respected than to be liked” he said with conviction. Keeping a diary would be a great idea, not only does it keep you in a reflective state, but it would be great to look back upon, and even give to the university archives as documented history. While working at a university who already knows your name and face, people are always watching, so make wise choices daily that make a difference in the lives of others. Imagine people are wearing a sign that says “Notice me. Make me feel important” (personal communication, October 30, 2015). Another great tip for those returning to work at their alma mater is to consult with colleagues, read, and utilize simple google searches to make sure you are up to date with the happenings of the University upon your return (Maloney, 2015). Re-connect on campus. Take professionals you look up to out to lunch. There are many steps you can take to make sure your time at the institution is fulfilling and beneficial.

Conclusion

I have found that there are both positives and negatives of working at your alma mater, but in either case, there are great learning experiences that can come of it. Also, much depends on the situation, institution by institution, office by office. One may return and have a fabulous experience, and another in the same office have a negative experience. I hope that this article serves as a spark of interest for someone to conduct research concerning statistics and case studies of student affairs professionals’ return to their alma mater. Many questions are still left unanswered in this realm. This may be because many student affairs professionals who are still at their alma mater would not wish to speak negatively about their experience. I would love to know the various routes student affairs professionals have taken, the percentages of people who have a similar path, and their overall feelings of their experiences. What percentage of new student affairs professionals return to their alma mater to work? How many student affairs bound undergraduates stay at their undergraduate institution for graduate school? How many student affairs bound students go straight into working for an institution without a master’s degree? How do higher education academic professional statistics compare to student affairs professionals when it comes to returning to the alma mater? Until then, I look forward to two years from now where I’ll be happily settling in to an institution and making strides toward success whether I’m at a new university or my beloved alma mater.

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The 8th Vector is a Newsletter sponsored by the Coalition for Graduate Students and New Professionals within ACPA. The 8th Vector is a wonderful resource to our members as it shares with fellow Student Affairs professionals trending topics and best practices. As student affairs professionals, we know that there are a vast array of topics that articles can be written about, articles typically relate to:

- **Lessons Learned** - Centered on experiences of transformational learning in relation to being a new professional or graduate student
- **Trends and Best Practices** - Reveals current trends or practices that new professionals or graduate students are embarking on
- **Research** - Focuses on innovative research occurring in the field
- **“Dear Colleague”** - This session will be modeled after the infamous “Dear Abbey” section of the newspaper. If you volunteer for this session, you will answer a hypothetical question of your choice in the hopes to share insight and advice.
- **CGSNP Spotlight** – Serves as an opportunity for CGSNP members and/or initiatives to be highlighted
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