

New Roles for Deans and Counselors

by

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Lots of people are talking today about new roles for deans and counselors. But that's nothing new. As long as I've been a member of NAWDC which, I am proud to say, is twenty years, we've engaged in fascinating discussions, in formal convention sessions as well as in late night bar seminars, of our future as a profession. I think it is fair to say that our preoccupation with the question is due more to fear of what the future holds--to professional insecurity and self-doubt--than it is to joyous anticipation of what lies ahead for the personnel profession. We seem more concerned with taking our temperature and checking our pulse than we are with measuring our vigor and testing ourselves against the challenges that lie ahead. There is a tombstone in a small rural cemetery that reads "See, I told you I was sick." Let us resolve not to erect that gravestone over personnel work in the 1980's.

One of the things that psychologists have learned about individuals who are insecure and who doubt their capacity for achievement is that they tend to set goals that are either too easy or too hard. Fear-threatened personalities protect themselves against failure by doing

something that they know they can do, regardless of how trivial or inconsequential, or else they go to the other extreme and talk about a goal that is so difficult to attain that neither they nor anyone else expects them to accomplish it. Either extreme protects the ego against failure. Healthy achievement-oriented personalities, on the other hand, focus their efforts in the middle range of tasks, selecting a goal that is basically realistic but that challenges their best efforts. Because they have learned to expect success, they are willing to put themselves to the test. Thus, they are constantly learning and growing as they pit their abilities against a task that demands a realistic stretch in order to attain it. Browning said it long ago, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

The analogy can be applied to professions. I see some personnel workers setting very low aspirations for themselves and their staff. Content to perform trivial functions, they never put themselves to the test, hoping to avoid failure by refusing to approach new ideas or new tasks. On the other hand, I go to conventions or I read professional journals and I see where student personnel workers are going to become the campus climatologists of the future--

the experts who will shape and control the total learning environment. Now, I don't really think that faculty and administrators expect the dean of students to provide the expertise on creating the campus environment--nor do I think for one moment that speakers who exhort you at conventions to set such lofty goals for your profession feel that your failure to pull it off will result in a threat to your

collective ego. In that sense grandiose goals are safe, if unproductive, for a fear threatened profession. If the profession is to grow, we will have to set realistic goals--goals that have a good, although not assured, chance for success.

Today, I am going to assume that the profession is basically healthy and that it is our desire to formulate realistic and important goals that will make significant contributions to the profession and to the campuses and students that we serve. Since we are likely to be more productive if we ride with educational trends rather than against them, let me begin my analysis with a realistic look at where education is going and the implications of these directions for the development of the profession.

There are, at the present time, some very clear-cut trends in education. I have selected for discussion this morning, two that seem to me major in their implications for education generally and for student personnel in particular. First, there are financial pressures and the closely related concept of accountability. Second, there is educational egalitarianism--the national commitment to provide equality of educational opportunity--and the accompanying belief that through education, we can remove social and economic inequities. Together, these forces influence much that is taking place in education.

Let us begin with the implications of the financial squeeze. Few there are among you who have not experienced this phenomenon first hand. No data need be given; both the reality of the present and the trends for the future are quite clear. Education is a labor-intensive enterprise, and when money goes to pay people, costs are likely to continue to rise faster than income. There are two ways to restore the financial balance--reduce costs or increase income. In the present climate, which includes substantial public skepticism of

the management of education, it is easier to cut costs than to increase income. Bond issues are failing, legislatures are reducing funding, high costs are using up the reserves of private endowments. No segment of education at any level is unaffected by the fiscal squeeze.

The first things to go in an austerity budget in which each line item must be defended, are the luxuries and the nonessentials. Unfortunately, many faculty and some administrators see student personnel services as peripheral to the main business of education--especially when it competes, as it must, with their own reason for existence. A tight budget induces competition, and only the strong survive. Objectively, student personnel administration is not a strong force. We are relatively few in number, and we are weak in influence. We have no direct access to the seats of power of trustees and legislatures; we have no unions; we are ill-equipped to play the game of power politics.

However, the financial crisis, combined with other forces, has spawned the concept of accountability, and accountability may become one of our strongest allies--but we shall have to be very very careful in our use of it. In simplest terms, accountability means that we must demonstrate that we are doing what we say we are doing. Accountability has some first cousins in the business world known as "truth in advertising", "satisfaction guaranteed" and more recently, "consumer protection." It also had a grandpappy known as "profit and loss" which, in the days before subsidies, meant that the product had to be worth the cost. Accountability is going to be both friend and foe of

student personnel administration. How we use it will, I believe, be critical to survival in the next five years.

The advantage of the concept of accountability to student personnel is that it places performance above brute strength and power in the battle for survival. The challenge, of course, lies in our ability to perform. The demands of that challenge are enormous, and I don't mean to be pollyannaish in courting accountability as an ally. In the first place, we must state goals that are widely recognized as important. Secondly, we must formulate specific programs that are designed to accomplish those goals. Third, we must demonstrate that we are making reasonable progress toward fulfillment. No easy task. And our past record indicates major failure in all three areas.

Let's take them one at a time. What are examples of goals that we can realistically attain? The major one lies immediately before us in the form of the second educational trend that I cited. Egalitarian education--the ideal of making education available and useful to all--has strong implications for student personnel work. It meets the first rule of accountability since its attainment is almost universally perceived as extremely important. Anyone or any group that can demonstrate effectiveness in providing equality of educational opportunity to groups of people who have been denied it in the past need not worry about identity or roles or survival in the years ahead. But regardless of our dedication to the ideal of universal education beyond high school, the practice of equal opportunity has some pretty grave problems. It will bring nonwhites into an educational system created by whites; it will bring college women into an

environment dominated by men; it will bring adults onto a campus geared to youth; it will face low-achieving students with learning tasks created for an academic elite. No educational institution, I think, is free today of the impact of egalitarianism and its potential for pitting numerous minorities against the majority culture. High schools sending students on to college in ever-increasing numbers, as well as receiving institutions, need to give thought to the fact that someone must assume the responsibility for orienting the newcomers to the existing culture and for the equally important (but generally ignored) responsibility of adapting the majority culture to the needs of the new minorities.

To date, student personnel workers have permitted themselves to be used to help students adjust to colleges. Neither we nor anyone else has devoted equal attention to helping institutions change to accommodate the new learning needs presented by egalitarianism. Indeed, the counseling profession is predicated on the assumption that if the student is unhappy or fails to do well, the fault may lie in his perceptions and attitudes rather than in his environment. While such an assumption may be practical and valid in some situations, it is not valid when new groups of students are brought into learning situations that were created for different kinds of learners.

There are four primary groups of people who are being brought into the educational mainstream under egalitarian pressures--those who have suffered discrimination with respect to race, sex, age, or academic ability. For each of these groups, the problems are different. First, there is

the group that I have called New Students (Cross, 1971). Numerically, this is a large group consisting of students who, for a variety of reasons, have poor records of academic achievement. For research purposes, I have defined them as the lowest academic third of the high school graduates--one-half of whom are now planning to continue their education beyond high school. Overlapping the membership of this group, but presenting different problems, are the members of ethnic minorities. The third major group that will gain new opportunities through egalitarianism consists of women. And finally, there is a group of people now gaining access to higher education who may well be the largest numerically of any group yet mentioned--the adults of the society who are ready and willing to take advantage of our talk about life-long learning opportunities. Let me talk briefly about the challenges presented by each group. Then I shall move to some suggestions for the role of the personnel profession in providing the best possible education for these students.

Of the four groups mentioned, I think that the low achieving New Students who are entering higher education primarily through the open door colleges are the most threatening to the self-concept of the academic community. Two-thirds of these students are first generation college students. Although some are Third World students, they are predominately the white children of blue-collar workers and, by and large, the academic community is hostile to what they represent. For what they represent is a challenge to "academic standards" and a threat to "intellectual values." Their test scores and high school records are adequate testimony to their poor academic

performance. But research also shows that their interests are noncognitive, their motivation for college is vocational rather than intellectual; and their attitudes are those of middle-America--a term frequently used in a pejorative way by liberal college faculty. Perhaps to reduce the threat to our traditions, we have marshalled our forces to correct their deficiencies rather than our own. And it is student personnel administrators who are most culpable in this respect. It is through the admissions, counseling, and financial aid offices that we have attempted to change the New Student into the type of person that we are prepared to serve. In part, this state of affairs exists because it is the lesser of two evils. We seem to have our choice between the very difficult task of changing the system or the seemingly less awesome task of changing New Students. What we are only beginning to realize is that where we have failed to make significant modifications, New Students probably will succeed in changing higher education, and secondary and elementary education as well. If for no other reason, they will change us because our efforts to change them in the direction of our preconceived models are failing. From Head Start through Upward Bound, and from counseling programs through performance contracting, efforts to raise the academic standing of the educationally disadvantaged, as it is measured by tests and grades, are at best marginally effective.

In the long run New Students, joined by many traditional students, will force us to look at our over-emphasis on the importance of the narrow band of abilities expressed by grades and test scores. Ivar Berg, who wrote Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery (1970), found that educational attainment had little to do with job competence, and Don Hoyt (1966) found almost no correlation between college grades and adult

achievement, however defined. Still, the majority of programs especially designed for New Students, state that their primary purpose is to improve college grades. Such a goal seems incredibly rigid and lacking in vision. But it demonstrates the entrenchment of the concern for academic standards and it will be hard and slow to change. In the meantime, how can counselors and deans make a contribution?

First, I believe that we should become the consumer advocates of education. We should assume some responsibility to maximize the match between institutional offerings and student abilities and interests. To do this effectively, we need to know the needs and characteristics of groups of students. And I believe that the basis of this knowledge must be research. The enormous contribution of personnel workers lies not necessarily in doing the research, but in the formulation of the questions and in the application of the results. Counselors and deans are engaged everyday in one major research activity--interviewing students. The orientation of most deans and counselors, however, tends to treat the interview as an individual counseling session or as an administrative matter; rarely do we use it as an opportunity for gathering information that could lay the foundation for educational solutions to the problems of the student before us and others like him. Staff meetings would take on new life if counselors pooled their insights regarding common learning problems and possible solutions. If we wish status as a profession, we cannot be content with the familiar refrain, "We work with students and we know what they want and need." Faculty and other administrators talk with students too, and increasingly, students purport to speak for students. The quality of the profession will be

measured by its ability to verify staff insights through formal and respected research on an appropriate student sample and to propose a specific educational solution. The programs proposed should not be limited to counseling and administrative areas. I trust that reform in those areas is carried out under our present roles. I am personally convinced that the profession will not make much impact until we get into where the action is--the curriculum. Examples of the kinds of things we might suggest based on research knowledge of New Students are:

- 1) We might document the need and then propose a specific plan for broadening the curriculum to take advantage of the interpersonal interests and skills of New Students. I suggested in the Winter issue of the NAWDC Journal (Cross, 1972) that student personnel administrators have an important role to play in the education and development of the practical skills of human relationships. There will be an ever-increasing demand for people to work with people, and we are going to have to educate young people for these new roles in society. Preliminary research shows that many New Students are more interested in people than in the abstractions of the traditional academic disciplines. It is nonsense to assert that the ability to deal with abstract concepts is a "higher" skill or a more important one than the ability to work sensitively with people.
- 2) We might work with social and behavioral scientists to extend the curriculum beyond the classroom and into the community. The interpersonal and administrative skills of counselors and deans are urgently needed to establish the opportunities and experiences that are increasingly demanded by both New and traditional students.

Work of a substantive nature in the community should not be considered an extracurricular matter. Properly developed as a learning experience, it is certainly as valid as a lecture that repeats what can be read in the textbook.

3) For New Students, we should be doing much more to establish cooperative learning programs, (half-days of study alternated with half-days of work). I have a research-based hunch that New Students are attracted to employment as much for psychological as for economic rewards--to obtain from the job the satisfaction and independence that are denied poor students in the classroom. Furthermore, concrete applications of the abstractions offered in the classroom may enhance learning effectiveness for New Students. These hunches could be verified through interviews, financial aid information, and questionnaire responses on local campuses. A program could be designed, and the counseling and administrative talents of student personnel workers could be utilized in coordinating the work-learning opportunities.

These are but three examples of the responsibilities that consumer advocates should assume for the education of a special group of students arriving on campuses on the crest of the egalitarian wave. The examples play by the new rules of accountability. They define a problem and propose a specific solution to attain a goal that is perceived as important by almost everyone. The final step in meeting the criteria of accountability is the evaluation of the effectiveness of the program.

Forgive me if I am too specific, but that is the point of my message. There is talk in the profession today of casting student personnel workers as experts in student development or as creators of learning environments. Such vague goals will not stand up to accountability or even to steady progress on our own terms. While few would deny the importance of a goal of student development (not, however, as the sole prerogative of student personnel) no one has formulated a specific program for reaching the goal, and we find it very difficult indeed to determine whether or not "student development" has taken place. This is not to say that we should not be concerned with the affective as well as the cognitive development of students. It is to admit that I would not be ready to found a profession on it for another decade.

Let me move quickly now to some of the other groups of students for whom we should act as consumer advocates. I am not going to dwell on the issues presented by ethnic minorities this morning, not because equality of educational opportunity for this group is not among the most important faced by society today, but because people are finally aware of the problems faced by these students. Furthermore, thanks to the emerging leadership in the ethnic communities, some of the programs developed have been highly imaginative and have resulted in substantial educational change in the direction of accommodating student needs.

The danger I see ahead for the ethnic minorities is two-fold. One, inadequate recognition has been given to differences between sub-groups. American Indians do not face the same problems as blacks.

Neither does an academically talented black student who wants all the liberal arts education he can get have the same needs as his brother who will suffer through school only to get the practical job training that will lead to improved economic status.

The second problem I worry about is the emphasis on the political mode of operation, sometimes, at the expense of solid educational progress. There is little doubt that without political clout, ethnic minorities can make little progress. Political pressures must be maintained. But it is also quite clear that we need much more really hard in-depth study and evaluation in order to make consistent progress in improving educational programming. To launch naive programs may be worse than useless. In the coming age of accountability, we cannot afford to operate token programs that appear adequate politically but inadequate educationally.

The third major group seeking to gain full equality in educational institutions consists of women. Women, as members of NAWDC we'll know, have a tough road ahead. Unlike the New Students discussed earlier, women present no real threat to the academic self-concept. Academe would not have to change its mission at all to accommodate the learning needs of women. Actually women are as academic, if not slightly more academic, than men when measured by grades or verbal ability or intellectual attitudes and values (Cross, 1971). What competent, educated women do trigger is an emotional response to well-defined and deeply ingrained sex roles. Many

people, women as well as men, deal with the discomfort through jokes and laughter about "women's libbers." Some women hasten to assure male colleagues that they are not one of "those"--thus reinforcing the notion that the drive for women's rights is not to be taken seriously. Can you imagine a member of the Third World smiling tolerantly about the activities of civil rightists while assuring white colleagues that he is not one of "those" who believes in full equality?

No, the problems of women are quite distinct from those of New Students or of ethnic minorities. The implications for our traditional counseling role with women students is well known by this group and needs no detailed analysis here. Incidentally, however, one common goal in counseling of women--that of increasing the aspirations of young women--is more serious for our generation than it is for the student generation. Research indicates that it is not uncommon for college women to aspire to positions such as college faculty member or college president (Cross, 1971). Many of us, however, are quite content to settle for lesser roles, playing the traditional role of helpmate for masculine leadership.

Specifically, I suggest that women personnel workers have some distinctive new roles to play with respect to the women's movement. First, we must develop the political muscle to make the academic community a hospitable place for the development of the full range of talents of women. Second, we must demonstrate

our belief in full equality in our own lives and conduct. I spoke earlier of the need for research on students. Many of you will discard that notion or rush to the nearest male to solicit his leadership in dealing with the mysterious "maleness" of research--hardly a good role model for our women students. If you hope to gain a place in the sun for women student personnel administrators, you're going to have to develop your own expertise--taking full credit for the research and design of new educational programs. You may not need to conduct the research, but you do need to understand research methods in order to ask the right questions and to interpret and apply the results.

There are all kinds of ways to get competently into the full professional role of advocate for education geared to students.

1) Go back to school if you must. Join the increasing numbers of adults ~~increasing and~~ updating their job skills. Take an evening course--or a daytime course--in research methods. Take your research questions with you and use the class and instructor to develop them competently.

2) Use any one of the numerous professionally-designed research instruments now available to study student characteristics. Organizations like Educational Testing Service, ^{or The American College Testing Program} will consult with you, guide you in the appropriate selection of instruments, and handle the data analysis. What you need to do is identify subgroups of students about whom you need information, examine the data for clues as to student needs on your campus, and propose educational solutions.

3) You can cop-out of research if it is really not your thing and still help the cause by hiring women graduate students as researchers. In these days of austerity budgets, you may have to trade a dormitory counselor for a research assistant. So be it.

Finally, I'd like to comment briefly on the hottest movement in higher education today--the tremendous excitement being generated over non-traditional studies geared primarily, but certainly not exclusively, to adults who form the vanguard of the life-long learning movement. In the final analysis, this movement may change education in more fundamental ways than any group I have yet mentioned. For non-traditional studies challenges the very concept of education as we know it. Traditional education grants certification using indirect measures of learning, i.e., the student's presence in the classroom for three hours a week for one semester earns three credit hours. Non-traditional studies proposes to focus attention on the measurement of competency, caring little how the student attained the knowledge and skills that he displays. Non-traditional alternatives are especially important for full-time adults who wish to continue their formal learning free of the time-and space-bound limitations imposed by traditional colleges. In the very near future, a 35-year old housewife may have a whole series of new educational opportunities available to her. If she has young children at home, she may opt for taking a course via cassette or television. Oklahoma has developed talk-back TV where students can hear and participate in class discussions taking place fifty miles away. Or a non-traditional student may wish to study independently, demonstrating academic competency on tests thereby

gaining credit by examination. The New York regents are now prepared to grant a four-year college degree based on examinations alone. Adults in England and students in New York may become students of the Open University or Empire State University--taking courses via correspondence, TV, or radio, and receiving tutoring and counseling help in study centers dispersed throughout the state or country. The University Without Walls uses the world as its classroom, granting college credit for nonclassroom learning experiences that mentor and student agree upon. Some universities have found their alumni to be the most highly motivated students they have as they attend a two-week concentrated seminar conducted on the campus. I find the idea of a class integrated with respect to age to be one of the most exciting things that could happen to a campus. I can think of few better ways to counsel and teach about women's roles than to create a class consisting of 17 and 18 year old coeds, mothers, grandmothers, and career women. There's a class that would teach itself--just the kind of thing I was looking for when I was attempting to combine deaning and teaching.

Non-traditional studies seeks not to replace traditional education but to offer alternatives for students who are not well served by present education. In so doing, however, it has already made a substantial contribution by raising some questions regarding our assumptions about the necessary conditions for education. Most important of all, Non-traditional education has pledged itself to deliver education to students in any way that they can use it. On campus and off, the newest and most exciting trends in education are going to begin with the student. That, of course, is right where student personnel administrators should be.

But we are going to have to be there at a much higher level of sophistication than we have so far demonstrated to the world at large. I know, from my long years of association with you as an organization and as individuals that some of the most competent people I know are in this room today. What the world needs now is not one grand reform movement that awaits the arrival of some great leader, but lots of little reforms that each of you can create in your own institutions.

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