

NASPA ORAL PRESENTATION

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To a paper writer like myself, it is always a little awkward to know what to do up here when my paper has been distributed in advance.

It is not safe to assume that everyone read it and even less safe to assume that the majority will remember it. But psychologist that I am, I do not want to reinforce poor learning by boring the conscientious while rewardwarding the lazy or indifferent by presenting the paper to you complete with gestures and dramatic emphases. So the program committee and the conscientious will be pleased to know that I am not going to simply read my paper.

Another alternative is to talk about the paper. But when I work very hard in the writing of the paper to express things as clearly as I possibly can, why should I then present it orally with less clarity and less well chosen words? So I guess I won't do that either.

A third alternative, of course, is to present an abstract in the half-hour that I am allotted today. But since the whole paper could be delivered in about the same amount of time, that doesn't make much sense either.

A fourth alternative is to talk about a different, but related, topic or to add new wrinkles to the thesis of the paper. But that seems an awkward way to get into a discussion of the paper itself.

A fifth possibility is to assume that the paper was so provocative that you all have questions on the tip of your tongues and are just waiting for me to quit so that you can get on with it. If such is not the case, and I suppose it isn't, that's pretty embarrassing.

So what I think I will do is strike a bunch of compromises. I'll give a review short enough to refresh memories if you read it but not thorough enough to bore you or to reward non-readers. I'll also state things orally in a little more inflammatory way than I would write them in order to highlight issues and to provoke discussion. Then I will strike off from the paper in an effort to raise some discussible issues about its implications for the practice of the student personnel profession.

In the paper, I described groups of people who are, for the first time in history, gaining access to higher education as a result of the egalitarian pressures in the larger society. The groups are essentially four--those who have been discriminated against in the past because of race, sex, age, or academic ability. A fifth barrier, low socioeconomic status, is better classified as a situational barrier rather than a discriminatory one, but it exacerbates the four discriminatory barriers. For example, a woman of low SES is much less likely to pursue higher education than one of high SES. A middle-class black has a much better chance of going to college than the majority of brothers from the lower socioeconomic classes.

For each of the four groups newly gaining access to higher education, the academic community presents different problems. Making the academic community hospitable to the full development of the talents of black students is not going to at the same time solve the problems of the 35 year old housewife who wants to enter the job market nor will it help the

47 year old dean of students who wishes to update or revise his job skills.

Our traditional answer to the different needs and demands of these groups is to counsel the student so that he can adapt his needs and requirements to the offerings of the institution. In the past, student personnel workers have been used--and I mean that in the pejorative sense--to help the newcomers accept whatever we happen to offer in the way of higher education. But in the case of low achieving New Students, we have taken the lead in devising remedial programs to help them prepare themselves for the traditional academic curricula. Our goal is to offer remedial English to prepare the student for English literature and not necessarily to help him in the day-to-day world that is increasingly dependent on communications among people. The secret agenda of programs for New Students is that if we are very solicitous and helpful in changing them we won't have to change the professors, the content of traditional academic discipline, and the lecture method of instruction. Student personnel workers have further entered into the complicity to change New Students instead of the system by devising counseling programs that are supposed to increase the academic motivation of New Students. The fact that New Students are vocationally motivated, pragmatically viewing a college degree as the key to better jobs, is an embarrassment to academe. If New Students are not to upset the academic community, then obviously they should learn our ways and adopt the strengths of our convictions regarding the liberalizing influence of the liberal arts.

For low-achieving New Students it is the instructional program that is stacked against them. But older students face a different set of problems. It is the administrative arrangements that posed the chief barriers to adults who are seeking to capitalize on our idealistic verbiage about lifelong learning opportunities. Some institutions have a shameless age limit

on matriculation. For example, "students over thirty-five years of age will not be accepted into doctoral candidacy"--a perfectly antiquated notion that certainly takes care of the thirty-five year old mother with a master's degree whose youngest child is attending school full days. But if blatant discrimination against age is not in evidence there exists in most institutions whole arrays of administrative regulations and schedules that prohibit or discourage adults. College campuses today are geared to youth; the assumption is that college students are students full-time. The part-timer is terribly aware of the fact that he or she is an exception and is swimming against the current. He must, therefore, expect to pay fees on a disproportionate basis, to take whatever courses are offered when he can attend, to sit through course requirements that he has already mastered, to fulfill residency requirements that have no meaning, to comply with library regulations designed for the dormitory resident, and to cope with a host of other administrative discouragements, large and small. And so the basic barriers to the participation of adults in educational opportunity are administrative. Some of these barriers student personnel workers have erected; others we simply support. Administrative and procedural barriers are gradually being eliminated in the case of women and ethnic minorities. These groups face a different kind of problem in joining the academic community. They face cultural barriers, and these are the most difficult of all to eradicate. With cultural barriers one cannot identify "the problem" and fight it head on. The conscious and unconscious discrimination against ethnic minorities and women must be eliminated by the agonizingly slow and inefficient method of education.

It is not only white males that need to learn new attitudes but ethnic minorities and women have to begin the very difficult tasks of changing their own self-concepts. Blacks--more than other ethnic groups--have made a good start on the process with concepts such as black pride and black solidarity. Among women, consciousness-raising seminars are sweeping the country, across the campus and into the suburbs. Blacks and women must, I think, assume the leadership for alerting the campus culture to their needs, but they cannot do it alone. Martin Luther King said it well. "You are not free until I am free, and I am not free until you are free." The academic community is not free until members of it are free from cultural stereotypes to be themselves.

How can student personnel help? What should be their role in the decades ahead? A lot of individuals and groups within the student personnel profession are pondering those very questions today. Perhaps the effort that is furthest along is the Tomorrows Higher Education Project--T.H.E. Project of ACPA. In Bob Brown's analysis, nine future roles are proposed for student personnel workers of the future. They are diagnostician, programmer, technologist, behavioral scientist, consultant, college professor, researcher, administrator, or unemployed.

Elsewhere, I have cautioned against an overenthusiastic endorsement of student personnel workers defining their profession as experts in student development. This concept is included in Brown's titles of diagnostician, programmer, technologist, and behavioral scientist. Although the role of student development expert is the leading contender

among respected persons speaking and writing in the field, I have serious reservations about it because I think we are not yet ready for it and I don't think we will be for another ten--perhaps twenty--years. We just don't know enough about how humans grow and develop. One of the reasons that counseling faces such an identity crises right now is because despite a quarter of a century of research--or maybe because of a quarter of a century of research--it is very difficult to demonstrate any difference between counseled and uncounseled students. The present stress on accountability creates an extreme hazard for professions that speak in glittering generalities about what they can do and then fail to deliver. I wonder if student development experts would not find the same problem that counselors have faced--no demonstrable difference between students who have seen a diagnostician and had their choices programmed by a behavioral scientist and those who had not. I agree, I think, with the long-range goal similar to that embodied under the pretentious term "behavioral scientist" or "student development expert." But I am afraid that we are not yet ready to found a profession on it. To study human development, to conduct research in the area, to try to push back the frontiers of knowledge about how people grow and reach their full potential--yes. But to say to the academic world that we are ready to put our profession on the line in the practice of the science of student development--no. I am not prepared to endorse the practice of the science of human behavior.

What then are some positive approaches for the student personnel profession? The role I envisage as the most viable one--given the trends of the times and our backgrounds and areas of expertise--is that of educational advocate for

the new groups of students arriving in higher education on the crest of the egalitarian wave. I believe that we should know the characteristics and needs of these New Students well enough that we can serve as consumer advocates of education--the Nader's Raiders of education if you will. Step by step, I propose that student personnel professionals should be researchers, in the sense that we possess the data and knowledge about the characteristics of groups of students. We must then be educational analysts to identify the method and procedures on our campuses that are posing barriers to the full development of talent. And finally, we must make some noise on behalf of New Students and we must begin to initiate effective procedures to bring about change. Goodness knows, there are enough administrative regulations alone so that a goal of the removal of one administrative per barrier should qualify one for recognition as distinguished educational advocate.

As I see it, the egalitarian movement is strong enough--philosophically, morally, and pragmatically--to guarantee any profession that works constructively to attain true equality of educational opportunity need not worry about identity or role definition or survival in the years ahead. Community in academe is, I think, not a place, but an attitude of respect and concern for the full equality of opportunity for all.