

ACPA Panel
Student Personnel Work As A Profession

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It's very difficult to be placed in a position of disagreeing with Dr. Brown's excellent report. I found it exceptionally well-done--well informed, based in the broad perspective of higher education, philosophically wise, and scientifically analytical. I hope that the report will be widely distributed.

After having said all that, what can one possibly raise questions about? Perhaps it is an even greater tribute to the report that its lucid definition of new roles has enough real meat to permit good discussion.

Let me first make some general observations, and then I would like to make some specific comments about each of the roles proposed. Of nine roles proposed for student personnel workers of the future, the role of counselor was not among them, and the role of administrator was given short shrift. To my way of thinking, that is as it should be. It is true that many of the functions of the counselor are re-assigned and retitled among Dr. Brown's new roles, but I think the differences are more than name only. The intention, I think, is quite clearly to redefine the functions of counseling so that they become truly professional. It is increasingly clear that "counseling", as

it is practiced now, is not a profession in the sense that people who have special training do it better than nonprofessionals. As a matter of embarrassing fact, there is increasing evidence that peers and paraprofessionals do as good a job--insofar as we can measure it--as professionally trained counselors and are received with more enthusiasm by the counselees. I don't think this means that the role of professionally trained counselor is an untenable one. It probably does mean that counseling should not be the foundation upon which student personnel work attempts to build a profession. It probably also means that professional counselors may need to give further attention to the things that need professional expertise as distinguished from those that do not. The training and supervision of peers and paraprofessionals and the creation of group counseling programs, for example, probably do require professionally trained counselors. Much of the personal counseling that is now conducted by counselors might be done as well if delegated.

As to the other traditional role of personnel workers--that of administrator--I agree with Dr. Brown's almost offhand treatment of it. But I disagree with his reasons for it. As I read him, he says we should not bank too heavily on the role of administrator because we are not very good at it. And we are not very good at it because we tend to be people-oriented people who are unhappy making enemies. It is my observation that this hypothesis has been tried and found wanting. Over the past decade, it has been quite common to recruit vice presidents for student affairs from among faculty and scholars, on the grounds that they would bring respectability to the office.

That, I think, has not been the result. Faculty-trained vice presidents and deans of students have done no better--and frequently worse--than personnel trained people. I conclude that the reason for the frequent failures has been the nature of the job and not the competency of the people in it. By and large, I'm afraid, an administrator has to have some power-base. The president has the board of trustees; the vice president for academic affairs has the faculty; the vice president for business has the budget. The vice president for students should have the students, but most have recognized the weakness of that position. I am afraid that history has demonstrated that the power of the students really lies in confrontation politics and the dean who plays that game is on dangerous ground. So at best, the vice president for student affairs plays a mediating role which someone like the president or the academic vice president can do better because they have power-bases to make their negotiations meaningful. While noble traditions, such as making concern for students highly visible in the university hierarchy, dies slowly, I think that the position of vice president for student affairs, as we have known it, is dying. Indeed, the move to abolish the office has already started on some campuses.

I emphasize the decline of the traditional counseling and administrative roles of student personnel work more brutally than Dr. Brown has done in his report, primarily to reiterate the concern of professional student personnel associations like ACPA that the definition of roles and the professional training of people to

fill them is terribly urgent. Fortunately for individual careers, educational change does ^{move} slowly, but most of the younger people in the profession will, I believe, have to consider retraining if they wish to advance to positions of leadership in higher education.

Now let's get to the specifics of Dr. Brown's proposals. I am going to react to four roles he has suggested as one generic role because they have much in common. The diagnostician, the programmer, the technologist, and the behavioral scientist, all lean heavily on the concept of student development experts. Of all new roles proposed for student personnel, this is perhaps the most common among respected persons in the field. But I confess to serious reservations about it.

Admittedly it has the advantage of operating from a distinctive base of knowledge, and professionals in any field must develop an expertise not possessed by nonprofessionals. This has not been true of either counseling or administration. It is broadly conceded even by research that personality characteristics may be more important to the effective practice in these fields than professional study. The problem in founding a profession on a science of student development is that we are not ready for it, and I predict that we won't be for at least ten--and perhaps 20--years. While it is not too early to begin training an elite cadre of future leaders who build upon the present very weak foundation, it is too early to begin the training of applied behavioral scientists as practitioners in student development. We just don't know enough about it. Until

we can measure when personal maturity exists for a given individual, we are in an untenable position to know how to bring it about.

Dr. Brown is well aware of the problem but I don't think he comes to grips with it--or perhaps he is simply more optimistic about its solution than I am. He states, for example, that "Our knowledge about student development, both in terms of theoretical constructs and empirical findings, is limited; it has in fact just begun to take shape" (p 114). He quite rightly calls for more experimental research and program evaluation (p 116) and observes that "Until efforts are made to assess individual student growth in a total fashion...objectives will remain paper ones only" (p 110). We cannot afford a paper profession.

We now know just enough from research and counseling to know that there are few measurable differences between counseled and uncounseled students (Cross, 1972); that is just why counseling is in deep trouble. Perhaps it is progress that our methods for scientific evaluation have improved to the point where we can no longer take the values of counseling on faith as we once did. In these days of accountability I wonder if we wouldn't find the same problem with the applied behavioral scientists--no difference between students who had seen a diagnostician and had their choices programmed by a behavioral scientist and those who had not. I agree, I think, with a long-range goal similar to that embodied under the pretentious term, behavioral scientist. But I am afraid that we are not yet ready to found a profession on it. The present emphasis on accountability and cost effectiveness makes a real hazard for people who promise things that they cannot deliver.

Where does this leave us then? Well, according to Dr. Brown's alternatives, it leaves us with roles of college professor, researcher, consultant, or unemployed. Most of you will predict that with my generally synical attitude, I'm going to predict unemployment as the future role for student personnel workers. But I am not; I'm going to come on as quite cheerily optimistic about the role of researcher and college professor. Dr. Brown has correctly given the formula for the role of consultant by observing that the consultant must be sought out because "he has some wisdom, technology or knowledge which makes his comments meaningful and worthwhile to the consultee" (p 94). Obviously, we're not going to be sought out until we have established our expertise and then I think we shall have to be more aggressive than the rather pasive concept of consultant implies. At the moment, I think it is highly unlikely that faculty or students would seek us out to help them plan for more effective ways for educating for human development.

I couldn't agree more heartily with Dr. Brown's assumption throughout his paper that the profession will have to integrate with the curriculum. Extracurriculum and co-curriculum are persona non grata. The time is fast approaching when we are going to give up our obsession with defining the curriculum and measuring learning on the basis of classroom experiences alone. Independent study, credit-by-examination, new delivery systems, and the credentialing of experience are all important aspects of the concepts of non-traditional study that is sweeping the country.

The easiest way to integrate with the curriculum is to meet it on its own terms--through teaching and research. Lest that sound dull and like a sell-out to some of the traditions that student personnel workers have been most critical of, let me hasten to explain. In support of the role of student personnel worker as college professor, I think the time is ripe to offer credit courses on personal development. There is an upsurge of interest in it on the part of students, and I think that we could teach a very interesting, very productive course--preferably at some time during the students first two years. Why do I think that we could teach it when I've just said that we don't know enough about it to practice it? Because its being done every day in the behavioral sciences. Psychology and sociology are not yet able to practice their specialities successfully. Psychology is not solving the problems of drug addiction, and sociology is not making notable progress in ridding our cities of poverty and crime. But they are passing along what is known now to young people who will be able to build toward the day when the knowledge and techniques of the behavioral sciences can be used to solve human problems. The same may be expected of courses of personal development. Personally, I do not share Dr. Brown's reservations about diluting such a course with a practicum. I think we would be a step ahead of psychology and sociology and more in tune with student temperament and interest if we did supervise a practicum in the community where we gave students credited experience in working effectively with people. People to work with people is one of the most urgently needed occupations of

the future, and we need to give students all the background and all the experience we possess--aside from whether we can apply such knowledge as yet to attain predictable outcomes. It is in these undergraduate classes that future student personnel workers will begin their training and that all students will at least have an opportunity to think about their own values and development. One semester's work might be slanted toward the understanding of general principles that are applicable to students for their personal use, whereas as a second semester might appropriately include the practicum and the content geared to students who wish to test their capacity and interest in working with people. Many of the traditional services of student personnel work might be developed around the first semester course including counseling, where desired, and career choice. Practically and politically, I think that the interdisciplinary course developed with the assistance of psychology, sociology, and education would be a better option than going it alone, but this would depend completely on the local situation. It goes without saying that the course should carry full academic credit and respectable academic content. The role of college professor for student personnel workers has a special appeal because it meets so many problems. 1) It offers students an opportunity to integrate their personal developmental experiences with academic content. 2) It lays the foundation for the recruitment of promising young people into the helping professions. 3) It begins to establish a professional identity for specialists in higher education who are

especially concerned with student development, and 4) It encourages the integration of student personnel services into the student's total educational experience.

Saving the best until last, I would like to talk about the promise implied by the role of researcher. I cannot improve upon Dr. Brown's statement of the role except to underline it. He notes that "The most valuable research will be that conducted by a team or someone who understands student behavior, the goals and purposes of higher education and research methodology" (p 101). In that succinct sentence, he has captured what I think should be the training program for future student personnel workers. The research role I see, however, consists primarily ^{of research} on groups of students as opposed to more esoteric research on human growth and development. I believe that the distinctive role student personnel should be playing on the campus is one comparable to Ralph Nadar's role as consumer advocate. We should be the advocates for educational methods and programs and procedures that are geared to the special needs of the new kinds of students seeking education in institutions that are traditionally geared to serving the academically elite. A research analysis of the characteristics of what I have called New Students (Cross, 1971) leads to the conclusion that this new group is not well served by traditional education at either the secondary or higher education levels. Totally new programs are needed if we are to make equality of educational opportunity more than a hollow victory --new curricula, new time patterns, and new learning experiences are needed by this subgroup of New Students who are beginning to enter the

mainstream of higher education primarily through the open door of colleges. Unlike the research quagmire of individual student development, we do know enough about the measurement of subgroups of students to formulate hypotheses, launch experimental programs, and evaluate the results.

Adults are another subgroup whose needs traditional education does not provide for. The needs of a 35 year old housewife who wishes to return to the job market are quite clearly not those of the 17 year old coed away from home for the first time. Student personnel workers should look at everything from procedures such as the evaluation of aging and nonportable transcripts and financial aid for part-time students to curriculum and delivery systems that are designed to serve the needs of these more mature learners. To do this we need some data-based knowledge of the characteristics, goals, and interests of these subgroups, some good research guesses as to how their needs may be effectively served, the design of specific programs to meet specific needs, and the evaluation of the results. If we had that kind of information, then I think we would be sought out as consultants on the basis of sheer competency and knowledge. But I think we would have to begin with taking the initiative in serving as educational advocates for change based on our knowledge of student needs.

In conclusion, I suggest that the first priority for student personnel work should be the advocacy of educational programs to meet the specific needs of students. Our professional lustre should reflect our solid knowledge of students and the procedures and experiences that

will help them to grow and develop as learners and as human beings. I think that neither the state of knowledge nor the present-day budget is sufficient to promote one-to-one individualized programs for student development. But I do believe that we can begin to move toward this ideal through the improvement of the group learning experiences that are offered by our colleges and universities. I think that such a role is more properly labeled researcher and educational advocate than it is applied behavioral scientist--although if advocates of the higher sounding phrase wish to admit that ⁺applied behavioral scientist implies more than we can realistically deliver, then I'll not argue semantics. I do feel that we should learn our lesson and avoid vague goals and high-sounding promises that are not firmly grounded in the realities of accountability.

A second major role that I heartily endorse, is that of college professor. I am not so much attracted to the fake goal of gaining respectability through the professorial role as I am through having something to teach that is worth knowing and that will add to the steady accumulation of knowledge of people and how they develop.

Finally, if it is not already clear, I should like to express my appreciation to Dr. Brown and to T.H.E. Project for an excellent analysis of the student personnel profession and the alternatives open to us. My comments are largely supportive refinements of what he has offered, and it is through such discussions as these today that the profession will make progress.