

Brooke Boyd's Personal Philosophy of Student Affairs

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## **Introduction**

Professional philosophies in any field must consist of four common elements, as outlined by Stamatakos and Rogers, which include an understanding of the basic principles that underlie the profession; knowledge of values that can be derived from as well as sustain those principles; congruent with the professional, beliefs and values should be statements of the roles, functions, and standards of practice; and an awareness of the definition and meaning of the profession in accordance with the first three elements (Reason & Broido, 2011). This paper is an exploration of these elements, combined with the personal experiences of the author, in order to answer three important questions: 1) What is the role that should be played by student affairs professionals to students and why? 2) What is the role that student affairs should play within the higher education community, and what is the basis for these perceptions? 3) How does the author see herself functioning now and in the future in relation to the roles described in the first two questions (Austin, 2015)? The following sections will answer these questions in order to define the Boyd's personal philosophy of student affairs.

### **What role is/should be played by student affairs professionals to students and why?**

A student affairs practitioner should always be assessing and evaluating the needs of the campus culture as well as the individual and group development of students in accordance with the institution's mission. The ability to understand the different cultural backgrounds of students and how to interact with them with empathy and understanding is also vital to the success of creating positive relationships with students (Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014). A student

affairs professional should have training in multicultural awareness with an emphasis on the theories, models, and practices for understanding diversity and creating inclusion (Pope, Reynolds & Mueller, 2014). Professionals should also be concerned with various types of development within students and student groups and how to provide programming and other opportunities for growth. Types of development include, but are not limited to, knowledge of social skills, professional and leadership skills, ethical thinking, and academic success. This type of student growth enables students to gain the knowledge, attitudes, and aptitudes to navigate through their professional careers successfully in relation to global changes (Dungy, 2003).

**What role does/should student affairs play into the higher education community,  
and what is the basis for these perceptions?**

Student affairs plays an extremely important role in the higher education community: providing opportunities for student development as well as positively influencing student retention and success (Kuh, 2011). By understanding the needs and goals of the students, student affairs can better evaluate how the institution is supporting or inhibiting these goals and try to create solutions for a more successful community (Kuh, 2011). An evaluation of the campus climate can also be insightful for understanding interactions between students and campus environments in order to create a comprehensive framework with educational purposes and designs that are focused on the dimensions of campus environments, engaging students to be more involved, and creating inviting environments of learning communities (Strange, 2003).

The historical adaptation of institutional structures to the changing organizational structures of businesses requires student affairs to find different windows of resources in order to make sense of the complicated and rapidly changing higher education communities of which they comprise a vital component (Dungy, 2003). Therefore, strategic planning must be thoughtful and reflective of the changes and modernization of the programming sponsored by student activities; asking questions like, “Who will the students be? What will they need to be taught? How? What are the needs of society that might influence students (Schuh, 2003)?” For example, enrichment of the educational experience can be achieved through an emphasis on diversity in higher education (American Council on Education).

**How does the author see herself functioning now and in the future  
in relation to the roles described in the first two questions?**

According to the Boyd, the basic principles that underlie the profession of student affairs are to advance the development of an institution's students and its higher education community. The values that the author derives from this standard include the need for professional and personal development, a knowledge of how to drive the development of individual and groups of students, and how to meet the needs of an ever-changing learning community. These values can be incorporated into the function and future of the author's role in student affairs in a variety of ways. How they are implemented is also essential to the beliefs of the author.

Multicultural awareness, social justice and equity, as well as a celebration of diversity are a few elements of student affairs that are important to the author's personal philosophy.

Obtaining an understanding of how students of different ethnic backgrounds face unique challenges at the institutional level can lend the author knowledge on how to identify possible problems individual students are experiencing, as well as theories, models and practices for battling oppression (Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2011). Self-awareness and training students about awareness of these issues can include methods of communication, online presence, and how to stand up for social justice. Boyd attended workshops at the Association of Fraternal Leadership and Values conference, which emphasized the cultural richness of the multicultural Greek organizations and inspired a passion for learning about different cultures.

The development of professional and leadership skills is also essential to values of the author. Creating positive working relationships with students in order to develop their leadership skills is part of what inspired the author to choose a career in college student personnel. Boyd took advantage of opportunities for holding leadership positions, attending conferences, facilitating round table discussions on important issues, and developing skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed for success after graduation. By providing the same opportunities to students, the author hopes they can then take these skills and advance themselves as well as the higher education community at large.

An understanding of ethical thinking versus moral reasoning is also crucial to student affairs, according to the author. Decisions made by student affairs professionals can impact a large number of students, the institution, and the community at large; therefore, a knowledge of how to make ethical decisions and training students on sensitivity to ethical issues, integrity, and accountability can create a more harmonious society. During her undergraduate experience,

Boyd created a code of ethics for the Panhellenic community and facilitated training for recruitment counselors and sorority members on the document. Students given the opportunity to create an environment of thinking ethically and to obtain the ability to be transparent and clear about issues helps them to take ethical actions (mStoner, 2015).

Skills associated with communication are also important: critical listening, interpersonal communication, public speaking, and nonverbal communication are a few examples. By developing a competency for effective communication, the Boyd can better evaluate and assess the needs of the students and the higher education community as well as create a rapport with these groups. Communication is also a crucial skill for students to develop in order to create positive relationships with employers post-graduation. During her undergraduate experience, Boyd took various classes for her Speech minor that allowed her assisted in her public speaking at various events, including a national conference workshop, and electronic communication about important topics to both faculty and students. Outlining different, effective methods of communication to students can be accomplished by offering a variety of platforms for training, addressing issues, and providing feedback for programs.

By providing numerous opportunities for different types of student development and involvement, the author hopes to contribute to the higher education community's retention and overall success. The author hopes that the values outlined above will provide some guidance for assessments and evaluations of the campus environment and culture in order to create a framework that will support the goals of the students and community. Boyd was the student representative of a CAS assessment committee for the student affairs department, the results of

which are still impacting current students. Identifying how campuses are updating themselves and projecting future changes will help the author make sense of how to make adjustments in order to keep her functional area ahead of the curb. By utilizing strategic planning thoughtfully, she hopes that her efforts to engage students will yield successful, values-based results.

Overall, the author hopes that by developing her understanding of the various values she believes are vital to the principles and success of student affairs, she will build upon her ability to contribute knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will advance the professional field. By reflecting on her personal experiences as an undergraduate student, Boyd can empathize with students in order to better understand their needs and goals. Part of her personal philosophy of student affairs is to constantly build upon her knowledge of the the profession in order to best serve the needs of the students and the higher education community.

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