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Student Development Educators: Stewards of Collaboration

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The American Council on Education (ACE), through *The Student Personnel Point of View* (1937), discussed many aims of student affairs work. The document asks colleges and universities to “consider the student as a whole” (ACE, p. 1). For the purpose of this reflection, I want to explore the issues of coordination, collaboration, and cooperation and how they relate to whole student development. This philosophy of student affairs stresses the development of the student including the academic, emotional, spiritual, social, and vocational dimensions of students’ lives. At Seattle University, a Jesuit institution, we believe that faculty, staff, administrators, and colleagues, in coordination with students, must strive for a total educational experience encompassing not only the classroom, but the campus and community as well.

While this belief is sometimes easily expressed through mission statements, in annual reports, and to prospective parents and students, coordination, collaboration, and cooperation are crucial to Seattle University’s effort to bring about student success. In and of themselves, no group can educate the whole student. Excellent teaching needs to be in coordination with outstanding opportunities centered on the academic experience. Examples of these opportunities include student involvement in campus governance, internship programs, and community service opportunities that link students with local, national, and justice international efforts. These opportunities contribute to a vital and engaged campus life. Further, as faculty, staff, and student development educators collaborate on programs and services, our students benefit in a variety of ways. These collaborative efforts enhance education, develop competence, define character, and manifest leadership for a diverse and ever-changing world. Most recently, we are exerting a concentrated effort discussing the idea of “Collaborative Education for Leadership.” The mission of the University is centered on educating the whole person, developing professional formation, and empowering leaders for a just and humane

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world. As such, it is not difficult to imagine a role more important for student affairs professionals in this process.

Explaining the role of student affairs educators to faculty, administrators, and colleagues is one area of my position as the Vice President for Student Development. Most recently, an academic administrator asked if the work done in student affairs was essential to the mission of the institution. I responded that the institutional mission and educational philosophy dictate that the work done by student affairs professionals is more than essential; it is necessary and of critical value to students' learning experiences. Manning (1996) states that student development educators understand their role as critical, "not because of their relative importance to the academic mission, but because their purposes and mission are intrinsically essential to the mission of higher education" (p. 2). Also, the work of student affairs is at the core of a Jesuit education, which affords all educators an opportunity to develop women and men of integrity, deeply committed to improving the life for all persons. The Jesuit identity makes Seattle University different from other universities in that Jesuit education is not focused solely on knowledge acquisition and personal development for the sake of becoming more learned or attaining personal success but also for the sake of becoming an engaged and responsible citizen.

Take, for example, the Division of Student Development's perspective on the Seattle University statement, Collaborative Education for Leadership:

Rooted in the Jesuit educational tradition, the mission of Seattle University integrates core values of a collaborative education: *education of the whole person, professional formation, and empowering leaders for a just and humane world*. The Division of Student Development shares responsibility for the success of the university's Strategic Plan, which is to bring about through collaboration greater integration and intersection of three areas: (a) academic excellence, (b) education of the whole person, and (c) Jesuit Catholic identity.

Dedicated to recognizing the potential of each member of the community, our enthusiastic and qualified staff cooperates to provide students with access to and participation in a vital and engaged campus in the center of one of the world's most vibrant cities. It is within this greater society that we experience the challenges of educating our students to find a healthy balance in their lives as they encounter the reality of our demanding world with its advancing complexity and ever-expanding opportunities. Programs are intentionally designed to help students be increasingly conscious and selective in all that they do, to be reflective and make intelligent decisions, to work with teams and build relationships and community and to embrace the challenges of managing their time and energies.

Emerging at the intersection of all of these areas is our model of Jesuit Education for Leadership: A Premier University Empowering Leaders for a Just and Humane World. Student Development educators are hard at work cultivating intentional, developmental, and diverse programs so that our students gain not only academic competency but also a sense of spirituality, values and confidence to speak from the heart that only comes through real experience. (Seattle University, 2006)

While *The Student Personnel Point of View* provides a foundation for framing the work of student development educators, it cannot be expected to serve as the educational philosophy for *all* student affairs work on *all* campuses. An educational philosophy for student affairs is rooted in the aspirations, goals, and historical statements that undergird the institution itself. Understanding the context of the institution is critical to understanding one's role and student affairs philosophy.

That said, student affairs professionals have the opportunity to serve as stewards of collaboration. We need colleagues for our work to be done well, and we should be unapologetic, respectful, and proud for what we do better than anyone else. Student development theory has grown, and the knowledge of student learning and engagement is seen as the responsibility of all educators. Still, it is those individuals on our campuses who possess the know-how, talent, initiative, desire, and aptitude who can role model for others what it means to coordinate, collaborate, and cooperate for the best interests of students and our universities. This is *my* student personnel point of view.

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