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Under-developed and Over-involved: Unpacking Hidden Realities in Student Leadership Development

Chris McGrath

While studies show that curricular and co-curricular involvement positively impact student development (Astin, 1993; Kub, Schub, Whitt, Andreas, Lyons, Strange, Krebbiel & MacKay, 1991), student affairs professionals must grow increasingly cognizant of the potentially negative effects of over-involvement on the college experience. This qualitative study explores the impact of co-curricular over-involvement on student development, and how professionals create meaning when faced with the challenge of over-involvement.

“Another stuffy conference room,” I thought to myself. I was about 15 minutes early, and, in recalling my fair share of meetings with “student-affairs types,” did not expect to start on time. The clock approached two, and only one of the eight people expected had shown up. I was at this point already frustrated with my research, and had begun to doubt if I was really going to get any good data on what student affairs professionals think about student over-involvement. My research was teetering on that obscure line between showing my chosen profession in a positive light, and revealing what all too often happens as a result of the pressures and challenges inherent with enhancing student learning. I wondered if the participants in my study would tell me what they really thought, or if they would hide behind their guard and guise of professional standards and student affairs theory.

By 2:10 p.m. everyone had arrived and discussion about the recent holiday dwindled. The group was charged with the task of identifying three nominees for one of several student leadership awards given each year. It seemed that everyone in the room understood who the prime contenders were, and that this meeting was scheduled perhaps as a mere formality in the process of recognizing who had “done the most” on campus that year. The discussion circled endlessly around identifying the individual who had shown the most leadership ability among a student body of 18,000 undergraduates. It was clear to me that significant involvement in campus activities was of the utmost importance as the prime contenders’ credentials rolled off the tongues of those privileged few seated around the table. “We all know that ‘Trish’ has done an incredible job with the arts commission, not to mention the fact that she is a resident assistant, works in the Student Center, and sits on three campus-wide committees,” one woman offered. Heads nodded in agreement, and it looked like “Trish” had made the cut. “Lucky girl,” I thought to myself, “I wonder how she’s doing in school.”

The idea of academic performance had not even scratched the surface of the conversation, and it was apparent that academics were the least important of the selection criteria. They were dealing with cream of the crop student leaders here. The three nominees were destined to be individuals highly involved in campus life, perhaps even over-involved, and respectably so. My only thought at that point was whether this group was rewarding behavior considered positive by most, but worrisome by few. How would such recognition impact the recipient’s experience, understanding of what was important in college, and sense of self? I thought that in all likelihood receiving the award would be a good thing. However, part of me worried that it would not and was concerned that this esteemed honor could reinforce potentially damaging behavior, and ultimately send the “chosen one” over the edge. Was it possible? Could it happen? Definitely – it happened to me.

While the intentions of student affairs professionals are for the most part honorable, the profession’s preoccupation with student involvement as the primary means to student development sometimes clouds its understanding of student development theory. Support for involvement is well documented in student affairs literature, yet the disadvantages and effects of over-involvement are less clear. One could say that the student affairs profession promulgates one dominant approach to growth: involvement in co-curricular activities. It is this “dominant approach” that is cause for concern. Boes (1998) remarks that even though “large-scale multi-institutional data support the claim that development, retention, and educational attainment are positively impacted by involvement [Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991]... we seldom question the limits of these findings, particularly for some students who are [over-]involved in co-curricular activities” (p. 32).

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By contrast though, Kuh et al. (1991) propose that “the impact of the college experience on students is increased when they are more actively engaged in various aspects of college life” (p. 5). Furthermore, Schuh (1991) contends that “students who are involved in powerful out-of-class experiences are likely to have a much more satisfying college experience than those who do not participate” (p. 2). Such well-respected findings contribute to the foundation upon which the student affairs profession was established. At the same time, this research has the potential to narrow the profession’s scope, its purpose, and ultimately, its ability to positively shape student growth and development.

A Glimpse at Student Affairs Literature

To understand the professional preoccupation with student involvement as the most effective means to whole student development, it is important to closely examine the influence that historical and contemporary literature have had on the student affairs profession. Most significantly, the evolution of *The Student Personnel Point of View*, and Alexander Astin’s student development theory will provide clear insight into the growing importance of co-curricular involvement in the student affairs profession.

Back to Our Roots

The Student Personnel Point of View (1937) asserted that “institutions have an obligation to consider the students as a whole” (as cited in National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], p. 49), and as a result, “called for continued research on student out-of-class life...to learn more about the activities in which students are engaged” (Schuh, 1991, p. 3). Professional literature as a result, continued to inquire into and highlight the importance of student involvement in the development of the “whole student” (Bowen, 1977; Moffatt, 1989; Mueller, 1961).

In 1987, NASPA revised *The Student Personnel Point of View* in response to changes in the academy, and the many identifiable ways in which student learning could occur. The revised document maintains that “students learn most effectively when they are actively involved with their work in the classroom and in student life” (p. 11). Consequent to this revision and continued inquiry into student involvement is the obvious conclusion that student involvement is an effective means by which to enhance student learning, and to promote whole student development – a conclusion from which student affairs derives its purpose and professional philosophy.

A Developmental Theory of Student Involvement

Contemporary research, most notably by Astin (1977, 1984, 1987), continues to demonstrate the positive outcomes of co-curricular involvement on cognitive, moral, and psycho-social development. Astin’s (1984) developmental theory defines involvement as:

the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience... a highly involved student is one who...devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. (p. 297)

While his theory bridges the gap between traditional pedagogical theories (subject-matter, resource, individualized), it brings to light the need for the “behavioral manifestation of [a psychological] state” (p. 301). That is, Astin’s theory provides a practical framework and theoretical rationale with which to engage students in active curricular and co-curricular learning.

Even though Astin’s longitudinal studies of student involvement (1977, 1987) argue that there is a positive correlation between academic success and student involvement in campus life, his theory acknowledges that “one of the challenges confronting student personnel workers... is to find a ‘hook’ that will stimulate students to get more involved in the college experience” (1984, p. 305). The implications for contemporary student affairs practice are clear: While our primary purpose is to promote student development through the co-curriculum, we are faced with the realistic struggle of finding new and innovative ways to engage already involved students, and “hook” un-involved students. The scene then, has been set: This dilemma sits at the core of the profession’s innate susceptibility to over-engage already highly involved students in co-curricular activities.

Someone Finally Asks the Question

Just as every developmental experience differs, so too does student capacity to pour energy and time into co-curricular activities. The point of concern, then, is when a student experiences the negative consequences of co-curricular activity. Boes (1998) maintains that there are common themes in the experience of the over-involved student. Her work with ten undergraduates from a variety of experiences generated six orders of over-involvement: (See Table 1).

Table 1: Boes (1998) Six Orders of Student Over-involvement

<p>Getting involved was a continued pattern from high school</p> <p>“High levels of involvement can have their beginnings in high school, and may not be unique to the college experience” (p. 34).</p>
<p>Students are drawn toward the benefits of involvement</p> <p>Students see participation in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to self and community.</p>
<p>Commitment and intensity in co-curricular activities increases</p> <p>Peers, advisors, and self encourage already engaged students to become more involved, and thus the importance of doing so intensifies.</p>
<p>Students think about over-involvement</p> <p>In spite of recognizing and understanding the variety of ways that over-involvement can impact development, students are unable to disengage from intense co-curricular activities.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Events change the way students think about over-involvement</i></p> <p>Students recognize that perhaps costs outweigh benefits, and think differently about the extent and intensity of their co-curricular activity.</p>
<p>Involvement looks different after more development</p> <p>Students change the way they perceive and prioritize their activities. The new approach to the co-curriculum results from reflection during times of feeling over-extended and under-appreciated.</p>

Adapted from Boes, L. (1998). *Developmental implications of over-involvement: Are we good company on the wrong journey?* Perspectives, 1. pp. 32-44

Over-involvement: Giving a Voice to the Struggle

In two separate qualitative pilot studies, a group of highly involved students and committed student affairs professionals were interviewed to better understand the impact of co-curricular over-involvement on student development as well as on the professional philosophy of the field. In the first part of the study, I sought to understand and identify characteristics and traits displayed in over-involved students. In the second part of the study, I wanted to understand what “over-involvement” means to student affairs professionals, and how working with over-involved students shapes their professional practice.

Ten highly involved undergraduate students participated in Part One, and represent three mid-sized universities in the United States and Canada. Upon soliciting suggestions from a variety of student affairs professionals, names of interview candidates were offered almost as quickly as those same students accepted the invitation to have a conversation about their involvement. All of the student participants were forthcoming in their responses and able to articulate the extent and intensity of their involvement in terms of the amount of time committed to various activities, and in terms of academic success. While the data collected were both rich and

revealing, it was equally important to explore the perspective of professionals whose mentorship, guidance, and leadership were pivotal in the ten students' involvement experiences.

Six student affairs professionals from four higher education institutions in the United States and Canada participated in Part Two of the study. Participants were invited from a wide scope of functional areas in student affairs, and represented professional titles ranging from Coordinator of Residential Programs to Dean of Students. The group of practitioners also varied in terms of professional preparation: graduate study in student affairs administration, public administration, law, and no graduate-level study. Their professional experiences ranged from six to 21 years, and totaled 67 years of professional practice.

While both groups of participants provided a wealth of data, it is important to present findings in a manner that is both respectful of confidentiality and in keeping with "whole" student development. Therefore, I have created composite profiles in "Kevin" and "Meagan," two over-involved students with varying experiences, and provided the perspectives of student affairs professionals struggling to create professional meaning amid the discussion around student over-involvement.

Conversations with "Kevin" and "Meagan"

A Day with a Star: Kevin's Story

"I really loved working with my old supervisor. She really knew how to make us feel good about the work we were doing, and always called us 'stars.' I never really doubted my abilities because I knew that whatever I did, I'd still be a 'star' in her eyes. That was important to me. I began to wonder if I was doing a really good job. I mean, how was it humanly possible for me to do all of the things I was doing? I worked part-time on campus, was an R.A., an Orientation Leader, an Ambassador, and was also trying to start up a new student group while already participating in four campus clubs. How did I find time to pack it all in, let alone find a few free moments to do my school work? All of my supervisors and advisors assured me that I was doing a great job, so even though I now feel a little uncertain about it all, they have confidence in me. It feels good to have people counting on me. I don't want to let them down."

"That sounds like a lot of pressure to have on your shoulders. How do you deal with that?"

"Well, I'm also one of those people who works better under pressure. The busier I get, the better I do. For example, there was this one night when I had a staff meeting, my one-on-one, and had promised one of my residents that I'd help her with her French homework. I also had spent most of my day sneaking in meetings and errands between my three classes. What I came to realize was that I had a 10-page paper to write that night. It was due at 8:00 the next morning, and I wouldn't be done with all of my meetings until at least 10:30. But I did it... I cranked out that paper in about three hours, managed to get a few hours of sleep and made it to class with just enough time to hand it in."

"How did you do on the paper?"

"I got a 'B'... not bad in my mind. If I were here to get 'As' all the time, then I wouldn't be doing all that I was doing, right? Students who aren't involved are missing out on so much. I mean, I'm a part of so many groups, and I have met so many different people since I've been here. I see students in my dorm who aren't involved, and they're loners. They have a few friends, and aren't having fun. All they do is study. There's so much more out there!"

Nancy Reagan Might be Right: A Chat with Meagan

"I don't know when to say 'no.' I have this card in my pocket. It says 'no' on one side, and 'focus' on the other. When people ask me to do more, I grab the card and remind myself to say 'no.' Sometimes it doesn't work.... I'm convinced that Nancy Reagan had something when she told kids to 'Just Say No' - evidently, not just to drugs."

"Have you always been so involved that you've had to remind yourself to say 'no'?"

“I’ve been pretty busy these past few semesters. I didn’t really do much in my first year, and then I got involved in hall council. That was fun, and our advisor was great. He made us feel like we were really making a difference. I then got hooked into other things like being an admissions representative, a student senator, and also work in the Student Activities office. I love working there, because it doesn’t feel like a job. I get to do really cool things, and spend a lot of time with cool people. Being involved is a way of sharing myself with others. It’s all about people. I guess I energize myself by surrounding myself with people – I’m a textbook Myers-Briggs ‘extrovert.’ People look up to me, and see some importance in what I do... so I do too.”

“How important then is your campus involvement, compared to your primary reason for coming to college?”

“For me, academics are pretty much secondary. I’m here to have the ‘whole’ college experience. That’s what they keep telling us - that college is so much more than just classes; that there are so many other things to do out there. Being involved in those things is important to me. It’s actually kind of bizarre when you think about it, though. Considering how busy I am, and that my planner seems to be my best friend these days, it’s interesting to say that being so busy keeps my life in balance.”

“I remember my undergraduate involvement and how important it was for me to maintain balance. What role have mentors played in your goal to balance an ‘involved’ lifestyle?”

“My supervisors and advisors have been pretty important in my experience here. When I think about all of the positive things that have happened to me since I started, I can definitely say that they have been a result of my involvement. I’ve really only failed once, and even then it wasn’t really ‘failure’ per se. I was up for a leadership position on campus, and was pretty sure that I’d get it. I mean, I had done just about everything that was out there to do, and if I don’t say so myself, my resume looked pretty impressive. However when all was said and done, I wasn’t selected for the position. I remember feeling disappointed, ashamed, and most of all embarrassed. This just happened last year, so the wounds are still pretty raw, but I felt like I couldn’t look anyone in the face; not my friends, not my family, and most of all, not those people who all along had told me and assured me that the position was mine. They were so encouraging and had confidence in me. I felt like I had let them down.”

Understanding What’s Inside

The composite stories as told by “Kevin” and “Meagan” reveal four primary themes that characterize their perceptions of co-curricular involvement, the college experience, and self. These insights can be characterized into: motivating self, searching for a place, setting limits, and accepting failure.

Motivating Self

It is generally accepted that students involve themselves in campus activities for personal gains (e.g., skill development, networking, etc.), and to explore the complete college experience. The participants in this study, however, did not see their motivation in as selfish a light. Initially, their involvement was defined according to how their actions impacted not only the lives of others, but also the community as a whole. One student reported, “I want to get involved because I can help the community. I see so much potential in students here, that I want to do all I can to make sure everyone has a successful experience.” “Meagan” also articulated how her sense of self-importance is a consequence of how others see her, and ultimately of how much of herself she “shares” with others. This sense of “otherness,” and need to “do good” for others to do good for oneself is easily understood as co-dependent behaviour. That is, over-involved students display personality traits and behaviors indicating that they determine self-identity and worth in terms of others (e.g., friends, family, mentors) who significantly impact their lives. Consequently, being a contributing community member and sharing oneself are clearly part of the reward system that drives over-involvement.

Furthermore, over-involved students perceive a higher-order responsibility to the campus community and their peers. They stress the importance of associating with different people, and making invaluable connections with mentors and others. Even though involvement begins with the most sincere of intentions, it can progress to the point at which the student engages in activities out of perceived obligation to fulfill a supervisor or mentor’s expectations. Although expectations to become over-involved are very rarely articulated, the student

again senses a higher-order responsibility to those people – namely the student affairs professionals – who have spent time “grooming” him/her for more complex and advanced leadership positions. Personal gains subside, and motivation is very much driven by the promise of continued nurturing and support of advisors and mentors. An over-involved senior student stated, “I have a lot of people to please. My friends expect me to always be the leader. [Student affairs professionals] are always asking me to do different things, and have so much confidence in my skills. I don’t want to let them down.”

Searching for a Place

The over-involved student surrounds him/herself with others to feel energized and important. For this group of students, being affiliated with a campus group is of paramount importance to their developing personal identity. When asked to describe their place in the campus community, they tend to do so in terms of their various leadership positions: “I’m an Orientation Leader, and R.A., a Student Ambassador, a member of the GLBTA, etc.” Finding this place is so important because their identity and self-worth is constructed around how they relate to and compare themselves to others on campus. Increased responsibility and advanced leadership positions further define the over-involved student’s personal identity, and elevate his/her self-perception above that of others. In other words, arrogance about one’s abilities and sense of self-importance emerges:

If you look at all of the other students out there, I’m much more well-rounded. I’m connected with administrators and they like me. I’ve had lunch with the President. I know a lot of key people on campus, and that’s good. Because of that, I’ve been given leadership opportunities that put me above and beyond a lot of other people – this is going to be good for me later in life.

Setting Limits

All of the students interviewed joked about not being able to say “no” to people who invited them to get even more involved. Since these students are personally nourished by co-curricular involvement, and find energy and self-worth in their relationships with others, they have a difficult time declining these opportunities. “Meagan” was clear in saying that “I’m convinced that Nancy Reagan had something when she told kids to ‘Just Say No’... evidently, not just to drugs.”

Two of the students reported having declined further involvement because of a low grade point average. However, others were not only very cognizant of their inability to set limits, but also articulated not wanting to “draw the line.” A sophomore student reported, “I might miss something. I don’t want to stop doing things.” The excitement and thrill of excessive involvement is addictive, and in spite of an inability to set limits, over-involvement continues to test the students’ boundaries and abilities. They continue to function with the finesse and confidence that others have come to admire. The addiction however, reaches its limit when the student eventually goes “over the edge” or ultimately, experiences personal failure.

Accepting Failure

The realization that one has failed not only others, but also oneself can be a horribly revealing experience. Positioning oneself for success has become a part of our natural socialization and development, and could be equated to the idea of “survival of the fittest.” As a result, people quite naturally fear failure. In spite of a super-human sense of self, the over-involved student can, nonetheless, fall prey to fear of failure.

In failing to attain a leadership position or in seeing a project go as well as anticipated for example, the over-involved student loses a considerable amount of self-esteem. A piece of his/her identity has not only been brought into question, but also compromised. “Sean” recalled the still very real feelings associated with his failure: “[When I didn’t get the position] I felt like I had fallen off a 10-story building... I still have to deal with the frustration, with the anger, before I can move on.” For this highly admired population of students, failure can sometimes be debilitating, even paralyzing. Three students reported having fallen into a state of depression following the realization that they had failed not only their mentors and peers, but most painfully, themselves. One student said that she had been hospitalized, while another chillingly shared, “I felt like I had nothing else to live for. This was everything to me. I wanted to kill myself.”

The impact of failure on the over-involved student is magnified considerably, given the fact that the encouragement, support, and positive reinforcement that they receive from advisors and peers does not adequately prepare them to deal with failure. Students are encouraged to position themselves for success by engaging in relatively low-risk involvement experiences that are often heavily supervised and mentored by a professional. That said, they often develop a false sense of their ability to succeed, and as a result, do not have the ability to cope with failure. One student reported, "I am taught only to succeed. Not to fail. I don't know how to deal with it, so I do all I can to make sure that I don't."

Student Affairs Professionals: The Struggle for Meaning

The picture of student over-involvement would not be complete without further inquiry into the perspectives of student affairs professionals who seek to create educationally purposeful opportunities for students to grow and develop. Four primary themes emerged as the foundation upon which these professionals constructed professional meaning around the concept of student over-involvement: building self-esteem, role modeling, encouraging and intervening, and valuing personal experience.

Building Self-esteem

I think the important thing is that we're here to back these people up when things aren't working right, so that self-esteem doesn't plummet. So there's nothing more rewarding to me... to see people come in here totally in their shells, and take that step out... and just with some coaching and some guidance, and some support, really can flourish and become outstanding leaders. I love that. ("John," personal communication, November 19, 1998)

Building self-esteem is paramount in the leadership development experience, and student affairs professionals work with students to bring out their individual talents and aptitudes. Leadership development is a very individual experience, and the skill of the professional is to craft experiences that afford each student the maximum opportunity to develop his/her talents. It is then, the obligation, although ideal, of the student affairs practitioner to understand each student's strengths and weaknesses, and to "be there" when weaknesses overcome strengths.

Whether we catch you when you fall, or simply hold your hand as you pick yourself up off the ground, it is our responsibility to make sure that we're at least there... that we know our students so well that we can anticipate their potential mistakes, and decide whether or not to let you learn from those mistakes. That is the skill of the student affairs professional, and I worry that there are not many people out there who can effectively use that skill. ("Heather," personal communication, November 5, 1998)

The expectation to intimately understand each student's abilities, and to anticipate his/her every success and failure, is an incredible responsibility to accept – some would even say indicative of a level of co-dependency that is even greater than that of the over-involved student. However, out-of-class experiences are one of the most significant ways that professionals can nurture self-esteem in college students. As a result, they must be incredibly conscious of not only their ability to do so, but more importantly, of the impact that this power can have.

Role Modeling

"Students have a lot of exposure to my personal life. They hear me complain about my kids, about what I'm doing in the community, and know what my family life is like" ("Jennifer," personal communication, November 5, 1998). Exposure to positive role models is critical for the over-involved student. At the same time, the student profiles demonstrate that over-involvement is sometimes a result of the inability to say "no" to mentors - to those individuals who have had a considerable impact in the student's development. Since so many professionals are role models to students, it is paramount that they display and provide exposure to positive time-management behaviors, goal setting, and priority management.

"Finding balance between [work, school, and family] is difficult. I can call into work and say 'I have to spend time with my family today!'...I was mentored by a supervisor who had an incredible balance between work and

family" ("Troy," personal communication, November 2, 1998). Furthermore, showing students how to make critical decisions rooted in personal priorities is an integral component of role-modeling personal and professional balance. The significance of positive role modeling then grows increasingly clear.

Encouraging and Intervening

The ways that many student affairs professionals encourage and provide involvement opportunities are not congruent with the profession's desire to "reach out" to all students and provide positive developmental experiences. "There's a level of comfort of sticking with somebody that you know... part of it is laziness. [Over-involved students] know the culture, so you don't have to explain all of that to them. It's just familiarity, like a comfortable old sweater" ("John," personal communication, November 19, 1998). Sadly enough, practitioners sometimes fall into the old trap of using the same students for activities over and over again. One of the challenges with student affairs work is that programs tend to serve only a limited number of students - that is, programs and services may cater only to the needs of those students who self-select into leadership positions, and self-identify as student leaders. The ultimate challenge then "is to search out and find people who might not self-identify and find ways to bring them into things. Because leadership is empowering... it gave me a lot of self-confidence and self-esteem. I think it's important to bring that out in people who don't self-identify" ("John," personal communication, November 19, 1998).

In four of the six interviews, the same student is mentioned as someone who is highly involved and is often referred to as the typical over-involved student. Cause for concern, then, is the greater question of why no one is stepping in and having critical conversations with this student about his activities. Why has no one tried to help him say no? Such concerns subside when practitioners take risks, and engage the over-involved student in self-reflective conversations about his/her overwhelming activity level.

"He looked like he was burnt out and suffering. He was still pulling things off, and still turning in quality work. But his energy and enthusiasm were waning. We took a walk and talked about how much I missed his enthusiasm and how much I missed his energy. I asked him the critical questions and tried to support him as he worked through things" ("Danielle," personal communication, November 12, 1998). Just as it is important for student affairs professionals to reach out to those students who would not otherwise be involved, it is of greater importance to reach out to those students who are suffering because of over-involvement. "Troy" reflected upon his experience and a time when he wished he had reached out:

I saw her in the hall once. I knew that she was in school for an extra year, to "clean up" for a few bad semesters. I told her that I didn't finish [college] in four years, and that it was okay. She kind of perked up and seemed like she wanted to hear more about my experience. I unfortunately, didn't take [the conversation] to the developmental level that I could have. I wish I had. (personal communication, November 2, 1998)

Valuing Personal Experience

Four of the professionals in this study identified themselves as over-involved undergraduate students. As conversations developed, each participant recalled personal experience in attempting to construct meaning of over-involvement. "I was very over-involved as an undergraduate. I thought I could do it all. I was in clubs, on student government... I wanted to do it all. But there came a time when I had to set some priorities and figure out what was best for me" ("Danielle," personal communication, November 12, 1998). Their recollections are reminiscent of the interviews with over-involved students and reflect many of the same characteristics and behaviors of those students they are trying to help.

Crucial to overcoming negative experiences with over-involvement is the ability to unlearn negative behaviors, such as always trying to please people, in order to be able to say "no" and set priorities. The research indicated that the professional participants had unlearned this behavior, but at the same time were feeling pressures from the expectations of their work to be highly involved and engage in as many professional activities as possible. Student affairs as a profession tends toward establishing relationships with students and other professionals, which are rooted in "a dependence on people and things outside the self, along with neglect of the person to the point of having little self identity" (Smally, as cited on-line in *Codependency Information*).

Furthermore, Astin's (1984) idea that one of the central challenges to student affairs work is finding the hook to stimulate student involvement, highlights the reality that professionals are sometimes forced to abandon their professional philosophy. That is, the culture of competing resources that has come to characterize many institutions forces professionals to sometimes choose between having a program that relies upon some potentially over-involved students to "pull it off," and not having a program at all. Furthermore, they are consequently compelled to ignore their personal over-involvement experience, in order to continue the tradition of successful student development through co-curricular involvement.

Discussion

Given the complexity of how an over-involved student behaves, is motivated, and reacts to success and failure, the implications for "whole" student development are equally at stake. Over-engaged students have difficulty developing self-sufficiency. Their drive to become increasingly involved, and the continued support and encouragement of advisors does not effectively generate full development and growth. Instead of developing a sense of autonomy, over-involved students possess a continued and pressing need for support from the various people who have influenced their co-curricular experiences. Over-involvement adequately feeds and enables these students to construct an externally defined identity, resulting in the antithesis of the developmental process supported in theories that shape student affairs practice.

How then does student affairs respond to the "catch-22" of dealing with over-involvement, while preaching balanced student development in its literature? Given that the relationships students have with practitioners are held in such high esteem, the professional must be willing to explore the extent of the student's involvement, and work toward creating realistic goals and establishing manageable boundaries. Boes (1998) maintains that it is crucial for student affairs professionals to work with students to set limits and make pivotal decisions about the activities in which they choose to engage. She further capitalizes on the Freirean (1970) concept of "do with, not for" and Manning's (1994) framework of student affairs professionals as those "who define themselves as educators who encourage students to reach their full potential" (as cited in Boes, p. 44), in order to support the need for practitioners to engage in a "developmental journey" (p. 44) with over-involved students. All too often, professionals aggressively promote student involvement and easily lose sight of how involvement can progress to the point at which it negatively impacts overall student development. With that in mind, the student affairs profession must be just as, if not more critical of its own role in student involvement, and grow increasingly conscious of how the "proclivity toward over-involvement is deeply embedded in our professional culture" (p. 44).

Furthermore, student affairs professionals must be willing to take greater professional risks and seek to engage students who would otherwise go unnoticed in the campus community. All too often, practitioners turn to the same group of students to assume leadership positions, or accept greater responsibilities, for the sake of ensuring quality and efficiency in their work. However, one is forced to "wonder where all the other 'Meagans' and 'Kevins' are out there, who weren't fortunate enough to meet a 'Troy' or 'Danielle' in their first year. They're out there, but it seems like we've lost them in the pack" ("Courtney," personal communication, January 1999).

Another Principle of Good Practice?

Given Blimling and Whitt's (1998) seven principles of good student affairs practice, it is clear that we have stumbled upon the evolution of an eighth principle: *Good practice in student affairs not only engages students in active learning experiences, but does so in a manner that is cognizant of and responsive to the need for intricate balance between curriculum and co-curriculum. Students must be challenged to not only involve themselves in experiences targeted toward lifelong learning, but also in those experiences that allow for the maximum amount of growth and development within a realistic set of goal-oriented boundaries.* Even though the existing seven principles constitute a value-based core of practice for student affairs, they do not incorporate the reality of the need for limits and boundaries in collaboratively fostering student development experiences.

The evidence clearly shows that student affairs professionals often push their most prized students to their limits in anticipation of textbook personal development. Students are often encouraged beyond their limits and

into a blind sense of invincibility, lofty responsibility, and false idealism, thereby establishing a false sense of self and the college experience. Just as the student affairs profession is wholly committed to helping students realize their most complete potential, it must also commit itself to helping those very same students recognize their limits, respect their need for balance, and work toward developing the self-awareness that will project them into constructing their own thinking and judgment beyond their university years.

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