

My personal philosophy of student affairs revolves around the premise that any student can meet their own standard of success if given the appropriate support and resources. While we are all aware that society is not equal and, though it may try, does not provide truly equal access or opportunity for all people. I believe our higher education system has an opportunity to provide that within individual institutions. All students attending a given institution are accepted with the expectation that they are able to succeed at that institution, regardless of whether or not they were admitted on a probationary status. Based on that, student affairs, as well as academic affairs, have the responsibility to provide support, guidance, and resources which will help students reach their highest potential in higher education. One caveat to this is that some students' standards of success may not match those of the institution they attend; in which case there may be little student affairs can do for them at that institution. I view it as my personal responsibility as a student affairs professional to put forth my energy to provide resources to students and support them as they reach their potential either at the institution where I am employed, or help them find their path to an institution which more closely matches their goals and standards of success for themselves.

From my perspective, putting forth energy to provide resources and support to students with honest intentions is what good work in student affairs boils down to. That often leads to exhausting days, but I know when I have a good day at work because I leave my office, walk out of the building, and feel the weight of exhaustion descend onto me. As that weight descends I often also feel a smile spread across my face, knowing that all my hard work paid off in some way, for at least one student. There are few things which contribute to that exhaustion and are also part of good work in student affairs. Putting sincere concern toward each student and paying them individual attention can be emotionally exhausting. When you are truly and

sincerely concerned about a student and invested in their success, you may be putting forth more energy than otherwise, but you are also making a bigger impact in their educational experience and their future. In addition to sincere concern, good work also consists of looking at each and every student as an individual. This means listening to their ideas of success, failure, hope, or whatever it may be, and also remembering to frame that in their own personal experiences. No two students are alike because no two students have had the same experiences in their lives. Therefore no two students should be treated exactly the same or be approached in the same way.

My philosophy and viewpoint on what good work in student affairs is, was inspired by my first 'student affairs' experience. During my undergraduate career at Albright College in Reading, PA I was employed by the Academic Learning Center (ALC). I was first employed as a tutor, then an office assistant, and finally a tutor manager, and I balanced those three roles (along with being a student and holding another part time job) during my last two semesters. It was during this professional journey that I realized my original career goal of secondary social studies teacher was no longer consistent with my competencies, goals, or even desires. Like most college students, I was growing up, learning more about myself, and changing my goals. During this transformation and time when I was considering what my future would hold, I considered what things I enjoyed doing. I remember laughing to myself and thinking, "Enjoy myself... I don't have time for that. I spend all of my time in the ALC". That is when I realized that I spent all my time in that office not because it was my job, or because I needed the money, but because I truly believed in the work they did there and enjoyed supporting their mission. The most obvious thing I learned from my ALC experience was that I belonged in higher education and not the K-12 system. But I also learned an infinite amount about professionalism and the many competencies surrounding and supporting it. As I transitioned to Penn State and

my Graduate Assistantship I was able to glean even more knowledge about professionalism from my experience in the Academic Learning Center by observing how different institutions and different offices behave and even how they handle conflicts.

My next major experience in student affairs has been my Graduate Assistantship in Education and Public Policy, and Undergraduate Degree Program in the College of Education. In this position I have had countless valuable experiences. I have served as advisory support, career counselor, teaching assistant, student organization advisor, recruiter, alumni relations coordinator, publications manager, academic recovery counselor, graduate school consultant, and the list could go on. What this position has done for me more than anything is synthesize everything I already knew, what I learned in classes, and the lessons I learned in other positions in my time at Penn State. The two things which I learned the most directly from my assistantship have been teaching and about myself. Despite the fact that for most of my undergraduate career I believed I was going to teach high school, I really did not know much about teaching. In addition to that, teaching college students is extremely different than teaching high school students. I am grateful for my teaching assistant experience from my assistantship for two reasons. The first reason is that I now have an even greater respect for anyone who teaches students, especially for college instructors or professors. Teaching has been one of the most difficult experiences for me at Penn State. The second reason I am grateful for this experience is because it has given me the chance to view college students from more of an academic focus than I would have had I not been responsible for part of their instruction. Learning about myself has been another outcome from my assistantship. Most notably I have learned a great deal about my own personal style of professionalism. This is based on a few different factors including the various roles I serve with students and the limited guidelines set

forth by my supervisor. While that limited guidance can at times be difficult and overwhelming, it has certainly allowed me to grow, explore different areas, and make the position my own. Making the position my own has also allowed me to connect more wholly with students and be a better resource for them.

One piece of advice that I have heard over and over again is to get experience in research and assessment. I was able to do just that through my summer internship experience with the Learning Edge Academic Program (LEAP). While research and/or assessment are not tasks I would want to perform forty hours a week, I did gain higher respect for the importance of these things to student affairs work through my experiences.

An experience I would say that I have had the same amount of freedom with that I have in my assistantship is with my internship in the Office for Disability Services (ODS). From the beginning, when I asked them to create a position for me, they were enthusiastic and accommodating. Since then, their main focus has been how they can support my professional development. I have learned so much from this internship from counseling students, to reading neuropsychologists reports, and talking to faculty from a staff perspective, to how to appropriately use language and make it my own. Language is an enormous part of our lives for obvious reasons. It can also easily lead to offending, alienating, or hurting those around us, which is even more reprehensible when you are in a role in student affairs and even more so in something like the Office for Disability Services. I have learned to take my time when I speak about disabilities or other diversities and to reflect how the person or people I am talking with speak. While this is a skill we learned in Helping Skills, I have been able to practice it extensively with this internship.

My aspiration after this program is to secure a position in some type of academic support function. This could mean academic recovery/probation, tutoring services, or disability services. I would also be interested and enthusiastic about an advising position. These types of positions will allow me to maintain the one-on-one, personal relationships I enjoy with students. It is with these relationships where I feel I have the greatest impact. I also feel that as a new professional these are positions where I will be able to learn and grow professionally, personally, and intellectually. Later in my career I would ideally like to work at a small to mid-sized institution where I could work in an office where my interests in academic support intersect. Essentially, I want my career to take me back to what inspired the career choice in the first place.

My core values are hard work, honesty, confidence, self-advocacy, and independence. Honesty for me is not only about not telling lies but about being open with people. While the level of honesty people are willing to give changes from person to person, I believe that people should give the honesty they wish to receive from others and therefore that is how I operate both personally and professionally. This is extremely important because being honest with other people helps you be honest with yourself, allowing for greater self-reflection and personal growth. In order to be as honest as is sometimes necessary, confidence is another important trait. Confidence serves as a daily challenge, something to always be working on, making (it even more valuable to me. I have come to believe so strongly in self-advocacy based on my work as an undergraduate and a trait which I am coming to value even more deeply with my advisory support roles and my role in the Office for Disability Services. Students oftentimes do not have to advocate for themselves because their parents do so for them. Eventually though, all people need to learn to self-advocate. It is my firm belief that college is an excellent time for a traditional student to learn to self-advocate. Independence is strongly linked to my belief in self-

advocacy because self-advocacy is a step towards being independent from one's parents.

Beyond that it is important to be independent or able to function independently from others.

This is not a cynical perspective but I believe that a person can truly depend on themselves

because a person is most accountable to themselves, while one may not be able to depend fully on others who may not be completely accountable to people other than themselves.

I know that by working hard, being confident in my abilities and honest about my limitations, advocating for myself and being independently (but also cooperatively) successful, I will be best providing for the students with whom I work. I will do good student affairs work, putting forth all of my effort to get higher education closer to being a system of equality.