What's Past is Prologue
The Evolving Paradigms of Student Affairs

Is the traditional framework for student services getting creaky? Consider these varied paradigms within which to plan the future of student services.

by Simone Himbeault Taylor

Introduction

Student affairs is ever-evolving; old paradigms are replaced with new. Yet old frameworks live on. Like the paradoxical anchor, sometimes there is benefit, as history can ground the future; sometimes there is detriment, as old notions weigh down the field and impede progress. The challenge, of course, is to carry forward the best of that which defines us while not being unduly burdened by vestiges of the past. The purpose of this article is to frame—and reframe—the work of student affairs within today's institutions.

Preliminary Framework

Student affairs[1] is largely a 20th-century construction that can trace its roots back to functions present at the beginning of American higher education. As higher education evolved and self-discovery and values clarification took priority over values inculcation, so did the purpose of student affairs evolve. (Of course, higher education, as it attempts to find the appropriate balance along the social reproduction/social change continuum, is not values-free.)

The initial framework used by higher education to define the institution-student relationship and manage student behavior, *in loco parentis*, continued well into the 20th century. However, as administrative and faculty roles became increasingly specialized, administrative processes became more complex, and expanding student populations became more diverse (with the infusion of women, veterans, and students of color), the role of student affairs emerged and evolved.[2] Post-World War II, the role of student personnel workers and deans of men and women became more institutionalized and specialized. By the 1960s, the role of vice president for student services/affairs was in place as a

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defined institutional function. Yet, at its core, the mission of student affairs described in *The Student Personnel Point of View, 1937* remains: the development of the whole student—not just intellectual capacity—as necessary for achieving personal potential and the betterment of society (Estanek 1999; Komives and Woodard 2003; Saddlemire and Rentz 1986).

Many of the current notions regarding the work of student affairs, particularly those held as a result of college and professional experiences, may not take into account the evolution of the field. Before the 1970s, student affairs largely used a "services" framework to address a growing array of student needs based on a holistic, human development philosophy. To be sure, today student affairs is still home to many familiar service areas, programs, and facilities. However, over time, societal changes, governmental regulations, and evolving principles of social equity and justice have created a demand for expanded offerings to both serve a diverse student body within a safe and inclusive campus community and support additional learning opportunities to prepare students to lead in a global society. Even these represent only some spokes of the ever-expanding student affairs functional umbrella. More importantly, this functional lens offers only one circumscribed view of the work embedded within a direct service framework. Frameworks have changed dramatically over time; indeed, student affairs has now embraced a much larger mission than might have been imagined possible in 1937.

Mapping Student Affairs Paradigms: Form Follows Function

Initially, one might be inclined to speak of student affairs as a collection of activities. This, however, risks fundamentally confusing form with function. One way in which student affairs is distinguished as a profession is its grounding in theory and research that informs practice; practice then informs research and theory in an iterative cycle of knowledge-building[3] (Upcraft 1994). It is within this context that the evolving paradigms described here have been formulated. In response to advancements in knowledge and an ever-changing student body, student affairs must consider—and reconsider—which paradigms will meet its purpose.

Paradigm 1: Defining student affairs from an organizational perspective. Blimling's (2001) communities of practice in student affairs demonstrated the progression of the field from one with a single coherent purpose to one with four coexisting and sometimes conflicting purposes: student administration and student services (grounded in management) and student development and student learning (grounded in educational philosophy). These communities provide both a historical footprint and an organizational paradigm for capturing the multiple functions and roles within student affairs. By mapping the purpose, theories, metaphors, processes, outcomes, and assessments associated with each community paradigm, Blimling captured one model for aligning the array of student affairs efforts in the 21st century. These efforts range from managing institutional resources to supporting academic mission to serving as an active partner in the learning mission.

An established literature base supports the idea of communities of practice. Theories of psychosocial development, cognitive psychology including moral and ethical development and learning theory, and social identity development provide a framework for understanding how students learn and develop.[4] The literature tells us how students make meaning and how learning is approached, constructed, and mediated by their own unique experiences. From Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors of development to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, the literature asserts that the opportunities for cultivating students' cognitive and affective development are richest during these transitional years (Chickering and Reisser 1993; Gardner 2006; Hardiman and Jackson 1992; King and Kitchener 1994; National Research Council 2000).

Additionally, a multidimensional literature base on the study of college impact provides ample evidence that the design of the total college experience and environment can have a profound effect on students' active learning, development, and the integration of their learning. Astin's (1993) notion of "engagement"—physical and psychological energy directed at a learning task—is a recurring motif in the literature for promoting active student learning. Students also learn from one another, and the power of peer influence is well-documented (Kuh, Schuh, and Whitt 1991; Kuh et al. 2005; Light 2001; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). In addition, the best thinking on the psychology of space has led to the concept of creating intentional "third spaces"—locations other than home or work/school where people voluntarily congregate—that inspire learning and community-building efforts that touch students in every corner of their world. Of course, today every corner of the student world has expanded to include a virtual reality

spanning the globe (Banning et al. 2006; Oldenburg 1997, 2000; Strange and Banning 2001).

One can comfortably infer from both this theoretical base and Blimling's organizational paradigm how student affairs functions might be defined. Organizational frameworks could include today's typical array of function-specific units (e.g., career services, service learning, student conflict resolution, housing), or they could involve creatively deconstructing content-based functionality into essential constructs (e.g., preparing ethical and empathic citizens to lead in a diverse, global, and just world; shaping safe physical spaces and ecosystems that encourage engagement and promote learning and community through living-learning halls, libraries, student unions, and museums). Thus, Blimling's notion of communities of practice underscores an essential truth: while functionality might vary widely, the fundamental "work" is clear: together with faculty and other educators on campus, student affairs is a partner in the essential enterprise of student learning and development. As such, Blimling's communities of practice framework represents one highly viable paradigm for defining the purposeful work of student affairs.

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Paradigm 2: Defining student affairs from a critical cultural perspective. Rhoads and Black (1995) advanced a role for student affairs that transcends functionality and calls on educators "to engage in campus transformation intended to dismantle oppressive cultural conditions" (p. 413). Positioning the critical cultures model as the third theoretical wave to define student affairs—preceded by in loco parentis and developmental theory—the authors called for a focus on

> the role teachers might play in creating democratic classrooms in which students struggle to understand how culture and social structure have shaped their lives. The ultimate goal is for students to develop a critical consciousness, engage in social and cultural transformation, and help create a more just and equitable society. (p. 413)

Drawing on theoretical constructs derived from feminism, critical theory, postmodernism, and multiculturalism, Rhoads and Black identified several points of intersection: inclusiveness, collaborative decision making, and egalitarian relationships. These create an "overarching framework for building educational communities rooted in an ethic of care and connectedness, democratic ideals, and respect for diverse cultures and voices" (1995, p. 417).

This paradigm emphasizes placing students at the center of their learning as well as understanding how students gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to comprehend their own intersectional social identities, the social and intellectual diversity of others, and the complex relationship and differential impact of privilege associated with these identities within the greater society[5] (McIntosh 1992; Robinson 1993). In turn, this paradigm shapes a role for student affairs in creating programs that lead to multicultural development, global intercultural understanding, and safe and healthy conflict resolution (Schlossberg 1989; Zuniga et al. 2007).

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Blimling's framework and Rhoads and Black's critical cultural perspective provide a helpful reminder that how we frame issues influences how we respond to them. As paradigms change, so do the definition of the work of student affairs, the approach to students, and the role of student affairs professionals. For example:

- In what way does the institutional approach to students change if they are viewed as customers, clients, learners, and/or co-teachers?
- In what way might the approach to the work of student affairs change if those engaged in it are viewed as surrogate parents, administrators, educators, and/or co-learners?
- In light of threats to campus safety in a post-Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois world, what is the risk of regressing to *in loco parentis* as a strategy for creating safer campuses? And, in turn, what is the appropriate balance between critical incidents management and advancing the higher-order aims of higher learning?

- How might the healthy tensions between higher education as a tool for social reproduction and a force for social change be negotiated?

These are only some of the questions at the core of the shifting paradigms of student affairs work. The answers are not dichotomous, apparent, or universal. At minimum, they suggest that the work of student affairs must be grounded in a model that places students at the center of their own learning. They also pave the way for considering yet another paradigm for guiding student affairs work.

Reframing the Paradigm: Defining Student Affairs from an Integrative Learning Perspective

While it can be argued that student growth and development is the work of higher education at large, most students find the delivery of services relating to these ends to be highly distributed and unfocused. There has been substantial discussion within the higher education community about the strategies necessary for achieving a cohesive educational experience for students. The literature is increasingly populated with reports from national associations and governmental agencies regarding student learning, defining outcomes, "purposeful pathways," and institutional accountability.[6] Taken together, these reports make the case for an intentional, seamless, and integrated educational experience linked to measurable learning outcomes across curricular and cocurricular domains (Kezar 2003; Kuh 1996; Magolda 2005; Whitt 2006).

Concurrently, today's colleges are filled by the millennial generation, whose members are distinguished by high group engagement, connection to parents, and value placed on being smart (Howe and Strauss 2000). Traveling through a life stage coined "emerging adulthood" by Arnett (2004), these students are self-focused on exploration and transition. Today's students want to create their own meaning through self-expression. Workman (2008) referred to today's students as "digital thinkers" and encouraged us to recognize the unique characteristics and capacities associated with this type of thinking: "For millennials, the growing sophistication and capacity of the internet has been entwined in their own maturation process to the point where it is difficult to determine the degree of influence one has had on the other" (p. 2). It would seem as if these emerging adults are predisposed to take an active role in their own learning.

A key question is, "What might effectively prompt this active role in one's own learning?" And, more to the point, "What affects integration across diverse learning experiences?" Deliberate reflection and action appear to be at least some components that prompt integrative learning (Freire 1993; Schön 1983). Integration speaks to the capacity to draw on the knowledge and skills gained from individual in-class and out-of-class experiences to create a new, more complex, and synergized understanding and application of knowledge. However, according to Gardner (2006) and other learning scientists, because learning is context bound, translating concepts from one situation to another is extremely difficult. "Scaffolding"—using prompts that encourage the translation of old information into new contexts—is one cognitive strategy for generating learning (National Research Council 2000). For today's students, meaning making results in both weaving together disparate knowledge (cohesive learning) and creating new, more sophisticated ways of knowing and acting in the world (synergistic learning).

Interestingly, Schön (1983) and others indicated that one can only practice reflection—it cannot be taught. Educators can create situations and then stand back to coach. Students must learn for themselves by synthesizing existing and generating new knowledge through a series of actions and reflections. "Self-authorship," a concept first introduced by Kegan and expanded by Baxter Magolda and King, may leverage students' capacity for active learning. Self-authorship combines epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal foundations with the development of cognitive maturity, integrated identity, and mature relationships to create effective citizenship (Baxter Magolda 1998; Baxter Magolda and King 2004; Kegan 1982). In concept, students examine their learning broadly to make unique meanings that advance their understanding of self, one another, and their role in the greater world. Self-authorship is the product of reflective learning, and it appears to be a model that may meld well with our understanding of millennial students and their need to control their own learning. It can be a tool for active engagement, and student affairs professionals are naturally situated to serve as coaches to guide and encourage this process of integration.

To be sure, institutions have experimented with an array of models to more fully integrate student learning, each of which touches on the role of educators in general and student affairs professionals in particular:[7]

- formally structured living-learning communities,

- service learning grounded in the practice of both classroom theory and community service,

- real-life experiences such as engagement in student groups and participative institutional decision making,

- internships that combine structured work experiences with theoretical and research underpinnings,

- creative co-teaching across seemingly disparate disciplines,

- learning frameworks such as Freire's (1993, p. 61) "teacher-student with students-teachers" model that promote active dialogue and joint meaning making so that the learning partners may find their own voices, and

- mentoring programs that link educators with students for deliberate conversations.

This is a very modest sampling; no single strategy will satisfy the need for integration, although all require intentionality. Consider, for example, a community service opportunity in a large, diverse, urban setting. Such a program may not, in and of itself, contribute to the enhanced sense of integration defined as an important developmental goal. Yet, when combined with (1) an academic course on critical urban issues, (2) active student leadership to construct their own learning focus, (3) mentoring as part of symbiotic community engagement, and (4) opportunities for reflection including planned conversations designed to stimulate connections between concepts and practice, an integrated experience can be created that strengthens student understanding of social responsibility and a sense of personal agency. These, in turn, are critical to developing integrity and, to Rhoads and Black's point, also contribute "to dismantl[ing] oppressive cultural conditions" (1995, p. 413). Yet, absent a pedagogy for integrating learning from these opportunities, the risk is a highly segmented, disjointed experience for students.

Another compelling strategy uses a "portfolio" process to promote integration (as distinguished from traditional cocurricular transcript or professional portfolio models primarily designed to document achievement and accomplishment). Electronic in mode, this process is also distinguished from popular social networking tools such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube. The portfolio approach is grounded in learning theory, student development research, and the principles of active student learning and reflective practice. In a program currently being piloted at the University of Michigan that draws on the concept of self-authorship, students make

unique meaning of their own learning by both documenting it and creating new knowledge in the process. Prompts serve as the intellectual scaffolding for deliberate reflection to help students process what they know and how they know it. This meaning making is then translated into a highly visual presentation of a student's "persona" (akin to Donath's [1999] concept of multiple personas and virtual identities) that is substantiated by artifacts of evidence, such as papers and documented experiences. The portfolio evolves and may be used for planning, sharing, and archiving. This approach to integrative learning allows students to better know what they know and then translate this knowledge into something useful in the "flat world" of today—a world, as Friedman (2005) reported, that no longer values the generalist nor needs the specialist but requires the adaptability of the versatilist. Interestingly, the versatilist might be regarded as today's generalist: what's past is prologue in a global world.

Promoting integrative learning is offered as a new paradigm for framing the work of student affairs because it challenges the arguably false dichotomy sometimes made between in- and out-of-classroom learning and creates a more fluid notion about what, where, and how learning occurs within the *entire* university campus (and beyond). It also challenges traditional notions of who provides the education. Instead, like a Möbius strip, integrative learning offers the opportunity to provide a more seamless educational experience where learning has no beginning or end. The importance of integrative learning suggests we examine:

- how institutions can create paths for learning that extend beyond what is gained from an individual classroom, cocurricular, or community experience;

- how we can get beyond the structure of *where* unique learning experiences occur and *who* guides the learning to focus more fully on ensuring that learning and development actually occur and can be demonstrated; and

- how students can graduate not only with an understanding of the "what" of their unique experiences but also with the "so what" of integrating and leveraging their experiences toward larger goals.

Organizing Student Affairs for Success

Structure. Separate from the discussion of particular paradigms is the issue of how to organize student affairs to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency. Many

organizations are structured according to function (e.g., personal counseling, unions) and/or specific student populations (e.g., multicultural services). Bearing in mind Blimling, Rhoads and Black, and the integrative learning paradigm, and with respect for the value of reporting hierarchy for managing work, how might these new constructs inform organization, at least conceptually? Moreover, how might these concepts be translated both within student affairs and across institutional relationships? Might a goal-based model that cuts across functional areas promote synergy? Might a matrix model reduce structural barriers and allow efforts to flow around identified needs? While no one model is appropriate across all institutions or across all time, posing these questions requires any organization to reflect on the essence of its work and how and with whom it wishes to engage in that work. This may require unhooking from established paradigms and principles (such as "efficiency trumps effectiveness"), challenging notions of who possesses expertise, confronting traditional barriers such as marked territories, and brokering true collaborative partnerships.

Imagine an integrative model for developing global knowledge and competency. Components might include:

- courses in area studies and global issues at large
- training in intercultural understanding and skills
- on-campus third spaces that create temporal and permanent global communities in such venues as residence halls, unions, libraries, and museums
- coordinated opportunities to think globally and act locally via community service and learning
- on-campus student-led leadership experiences to actively practice translating learning into action
- study, travel, and internships overseas with the explicit goal of actively engaging with local communities
- reflective practice to make meaning across all experiences and to link these to future aspirations for self and society

This is a model for shaping environments and experiences that provide opportunities to practice intentional planning, deliberate reflection, and active learning with regard to self-established learning goals. But truly achieving such integration will require reconsidering structures, funding mechanisms, and definitions of accountability. It will require the entire institution to move from the question of "what are our functions?" to "what are we seeking to accomplish?" Ultimately, as advocated by the University of Michigan's

vice president for student affairs, Royster Harper, it requires us to distinguish "the job" from "the work."

Behaving as learning organizations. Blimling and Whitt (1999) identify seven "good practices in student affairs" that represent the building blocks of effective practice. According to the authors, good practice in student affairs:

- engages students in active learning
- helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards
- sets and communicates high expectations for learning
- uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance
- uses resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals
- forges educational partnerships that advance student learning
- builds supportive and inclusive communities

These principles clearly fit with the "theory to research to practice" loop. It is worth emphasizing that practitioners have a role and a responsibility to contribute to the theoretical understanding of this work. Similarly, academicians can benefit from immersing themselves in the field to test ideas and bring authenticity to their findings.

Success demands continuous stretching to go beyond the "what" to defining the "so what" of the work.

Good planning is necessary for any group that wishes to function as a learning organization and go from good to great (Collins 2001, 2005; Senge 1990). Carefully constructed strategic planning at all levels can ensure that organizational goals are understood and appropriately advanced to create deep change (Taylor and Matney 2007). Attention to Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frames—structural, human resources, political, and symbolic—can guide organizations in solving problems in ways congruent with their strategic direction. At the individual level, reflective practice is every bit as essential for professional staff as it is for students. In turn, organizational investment in intentional coaching and ongoing professional development ensures that staff have the appropriate building blocks needed to live the work. Of course, strong management skills (visionary leadership, communication, and integrity at a minimum) are imperative

for success. Success demands continuous stretching to go beyond the "what" to defining the "so what" of the work.

Keeping ourselves accountable. Without question, evaluation and accountability are essential within student affairs. They indicate whether intended objectives are being satisfied and ultimately improve the effort extended. It bears noting, however, that all the benefits of higher education may not be able to be reduced to component parts, measurable outcomes, or metrics. Further, not everything that can be measured will, or necessarily should, be. The current dialogue places tremendous emphasis on outcomes. While having a desired end in mind can be healthy, there is a risk of over-simplifying learning outcomes into disaggregated parts. We might better focus on educational goals rather than on outcomes; the concept of goals emphasizes the ongoing process of becoming rather than being—it is an educational mindset grounded in a core value. Yet it is clear that we must become more deliberate in understanding the impact of educational interventions and in turn using appropriately aligned assessment tools.

Separate but related to these concepts is one of professional standards, such as those promoted by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education and those standards and principles of practice asserted by central (e.g., National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, American College Personnel Association) and domain-specific professional associations (e.g., American Psychological Association, National Association of Colleges and Employers, American Society of Journalists and Authors). Adherence to laws, principles, and professional and personal ethics ultimately defines the profession and the professional.

In the end, how we accomplish our purpose may be determined less by organizational structure and more by clarity about who we wish to become. This might include becoming

- student-centered
- strategically proactive
- accessible, responsive, and accountable in our actions
- careful listeners leveraging the input of multiple voices
- committed to improving the social condition for all living beings
- risk-takers who "fail big" in the name of charting new territory
- dedicated to our own lifelong learning

Conclusion

To advance a shared vision for more integrative and deliberate student learning will require all those who identify themselves as educators, whether faculty or staff, to work in tandem. Together, we have an opportunity to help students weave together holistic, integrative learning derived from multiple sources to create new knowledge. This new knowledge will inform students about who they are and want to be, who they are in relation to others, and what they aspire to as global citizens for the betterment of society. While structures may vary, the work of student affairs optimally centers around helping students create their own meaning from intentionally-designed learning experiences and environments on which they can reflect. This, in turn, begs a reframing of the student affairs paradigm to one of institutional agent affecting integrative learning through reflective practice that keeps students (and professional educators) at the center of their own learning. ▓

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Notes

1. The term "student affairs" is used throughout this article to represent the organizational domain associated with the student cocurricular experience; however, as this article demonstrates, this is a somewhat artificial representation.

2. Hirt (2006) observed that the roles of faculty and staff vary by institutional type and distinguishes the following types of institutions: liberal arts colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, comprehensive institutions, research universities, historically black colleges/universities, community colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutions.

3. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive listing of student development and college impact literature, which includes both broad-based and functionally specific readings. The interested reader is encouraged to explore this multifaceted literature, perhaps beginning with foundational references (see, for example, Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

4. While much of the research literature is based on 18- to 22-year-old college students, the use of the term "student" in this article is intended to include students of all social identities and class levels, from entering students to Ph.D. candidates.

5. A substantial literature base exists that includes, but is not limited to, the issues and intersection of social diversity in race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexual orientation, gender and gender expression, disability, religion, age, and intellectual diversity of ideas.

6. Some key reports include those of the American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (1998); American College Personnel Association (1996); American College Personnel Association and allied associations (Keeling 2006); Association of American Colleges and Universities (Association of American Colleges and Universities 2002, 2007; Leskes and Miller 2006); Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006); and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and American College Personnel Association (2004).

7. Some of the listed concepts are drawn from Blimling and Whitt (1999).