

When I entered the College Student Affairs program I had graduated from college only one month earlier. I had been introduced to student affairs through my work as a resident assistant (RA) and as the High Sierra representative and through interactions with students and alumni of the program. Still my view of student affairs at that point was fairly narrow. I had come to believe that as I entered the world of student affairs I was permanently closing the door on a childhood dream of teaching. I believed, rather, that I was entering a profession, in which, I would spend my days counseling, mentoring and planning events. I believed that God had called me to the ministry of caring for college students, and I could not have been more excited. I would be able to pass the love, compassion and support that I had received along to future college students.

Today, I cannot help but laugh, a little, at myself. My view was so narrow; certainly I do my fair share of counseling, mentoring and planning events but I do so much more. My actions are not solely rooted in the idea of ministry they are founded in development. Further, I have come to recognize that in no way did I close the door on teaching; rather I changed my approach to teaching.

Central to my understanding of student affairs is the idea of holistic development. When I work with students I strive to remember that they are becoming “whole” people, therefore the learning I offer them must meet their physical, emotional, social, academic and spiritual needs. At times, I am overwhelmed by the massiveness of this task but then I am reminded of three things; I have a growing arsenal of tools, ideas and theories at my disposal, I am blessed to be able to partner with many other individuals on the university campus,

and I have great love and compassion for my students and this is one of the greatest gifts I can offer them (Boleman & Deal, 2001).

One of my favorite classes in the College Student Affairs program was *The Process of Adult Development*. Through this course I developed an appreciation for theory because it directs practice and has become an invaluable tool. I am sure that I will continue to develop greater appreciation for many different theories and ideas in the years ahead, but in the past three years it is Parks (2000), Chickering (1969), Astin (1984) and Baxter-Magolda (2003) that have meant the most to me.

Sharon Parks (2000) champions the idea of developing mentoring communities. These are communities in which students come to ask big questions, interact with other members within the community, come to encounter ideas from outside the community, and develop habits of the mind. Characterized by the practices of the hearth, table and the commons, mentoring communities become places of safety and love. It is here that young adults satisfy their thirst for meaningful conversations, and are encouraged to use their imagination and ask questions. Using the ideas of hearth, table and commons I can assist my students in unique ways as they ask questions about faith, life and purpose.

Chickering's (1969) seven vectors are accepted as the major questions and challenges that college students must overcome on their journey toward solidifying their identity. The theory is not rigid but is fluid and, therefore, remains applicable for most students. It also remains true to the ideas of holistic development incorporating aspects of "emotional, interpersonal, ethical and intellectual aspects of development" (Evans, et. al, 1998, p. 38) into each vector. This theory serves as a

loose map for the journey on which many college students find themselves. This basic understanding of the direction they may be headed enables me to be a more effective guide as we journey together.

Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement asserted that in order "for student learning and growth to take place, students need to actively engage in their environment" (Evans, et. al, 1998, p. 27). More than focusing on development itself we need to think intentionally about the events, activities, discussions and opportunities we provide that facilitate the growth. It is more about the actions of a student than the feelings, besides it is generally accepted that actions speak louder than words. With this theory in mind, I intentionally invest time in activities and places that will cultivate student involvement within an institution

Self- authorship, as written by Baxter-Magolda (2003), is the goal of education. It is the idea that through college students will become authors of their own lives, forming habits, beliefs, relationships and identities that will carry them through life. Society expects that college graduates will be prepared to enter the workforce, and society in general, as leaders, confident and prepared for whatever life may hold. While this may be an unfair expectation of college graduates, I can set them on a trajectory for success by striving to create campus environments that allow students to develop their sense of authorship.

These theories have greatly impacted how I approach my interactions with students and the way in which I plan and develop programs. They have served, as indispensable guides to me regarding how to use my resources most beneficially to increase learning specifically at High Sierra.

It is important for me to remember that I am not expected to assist in the development of students on my own. In fact, valuable partners, including faculty members, surround me. Herein lies another notable change in my understanding of student affairs; the world of student affairs is intricately connected to the academic world on a college or university campus.

As a student it was all too easy to separate the learning in the classroom from the “fun” that occurred elsewhere on campus. The two appeared to be mutually exclusive activities. However, now I see that the two are held in tension both aiming to help the student grow and development. Through coursework and my assistantship I have discovered that one of the most powerful resources available to me in helping students learn is my ability to collaborate with faculty members on my campus.

*Powerful Partnerships* (1998) asserted that universities are most successful at deepening student learning when faculty and staff work together. As we learn to partner with each other we become better models of the learning that occurs in social settings; after all “learning is done by individuals who are intrinsically tied to others as social beings” (p. 1). Thus we encourage the social and educational interactions of students and faculty. We endeavor to create environments where students discuss their academic pursuits outside of the classroom. I partner with faculty to find ways to encourage the development of community while also fostering the academic pursuit of students.

Further, we are able to become co-creators in designing a learning environment. “Learning is strongly affected by the educational climate in which it

takes place: the settings and surroundings, the influence of others, and the values accorded to the life of the mind and to learning achievements” (*Powerful Partnerships*, 1998, p. 2). That is to say that as collaborators we can think creatively about ways to celebrate academic achievement, and ways to explain to students how their work in the classroom is vital to the work they will do, or are doing, in the world. Above all it is imperative that faculty and staff are on the same page when presenting these ideas to students. This is done most successfully when faculty and staff are able to model the community they desire to see within the students.

*Learning Reconsidered* (2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (2006) reinforce the idea of partnering with faculty members to create a meaningful learning environment. Specifically, these two works propose two ideas that allow faculty and staff to get on the same page, learning outcomes and co-curricular mapping. The call to reconsider learning outcomes rests in the idea that “learning, development and identity formation can no longer be considered as separate from each other, but rather they are interactive and shape each other as they evolve” (*Learning Reconsidered*, 2004, p. 10). When we acknowledge that all learning and development is connected then we must admit that it is the responsibility of all educators to work towards holistic growth. Learning outcomes allow us to focus our efforts and therefore educate and model more effectively and directly.

Co-curricular maps were proposed in *Learning Reconsidered 2* as a means of “recognizing, identifying and documenting the sites for learning activities on campus ... [additionally informing] practitioners about the kinds of activities that will enhance classroom experiences and help the campus develop a broader

understanding of transformative learning” (ACPA, et. al, 2006, p. 11 -12). As we aim to become co-creators with faculty members in the educational experience it is helpful to have a visual picture or explanation of how the world of student affairs assists in achieving the learning outcomes. Co-curricular maps can also include the curriculum offered within a given program, such as High Sierra, then faculty and staff are able to see how their activities and courses connect and build on each other.

The ideas proposed through *Powerful Partnerships, Learning Reconsidered* and *Learning Reconsidered 2* have reinforced my conviction that I need to be diligent in pursuing relationships with colleagues across the university campus. As I invest in these relationships I am better able to promote learning and growth in my students.

As my completion of the College Student Affairs program looms ever closer, I often hear the question; what’s next? Honestly, staying exactly where I am. I am so thrilled to be working in a job I love with colleagues I admire and students I adore. High Sierra allows me to pursue and integrate many of my passions in life and I could not imagine myself doing anything else. I hope to remain here as long as I am relevant to the students, continue to be a good fit for the program and am able to remain healthy and continue growing.

When the time comes to eventually move on I would hope to find a place where I can focus on leadership development or work with students through outdoor programming or some combination of the two. Until then, I am excited to see what God holds for me in the next few years at High Sierra.

Here are some of my personal and professional goals for the next few years:

**Personal goals:**

- Run a half marathon
- Begin hiking the Appalachian Trail
- Continue to build a community outside the High Sierra world
- Learn to play guitar
- Pleasure reading
- Get involved in a Bible study
- Visit each of my sisters for a week (New York, Southern California, Missouri)
- Take a cruise to Alaska

**Professional goals:**

- Attend professional conferences
- Continue to develop skills in the backcountry and as a facilitator
- Maintain membership with ACSD
- Mentor one student who is not required to meet with me
- Continue reading and discussing books that offer insights and thoughts for professional development
- Pursue instructing an undergraduate leadership course
- Seek new ways to partner with colleagues on the main campus (for example: Residence Life, Communiversity)
- Read at least one scholarly article a month
- Remain in a job that I love
- Consider a doctoral program

The last three years have been an adventure of learning, dreaming and expanding my understanding of student affairs. What is most exciting as I reflect on the meaningful lessons, theories, and ideas from the last few years is to think that it is only the beginning. I look forward to the continued learning and experiences that lie on the path ahead of me.

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