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Academic and student affairs officers in New England meet regularly to identify and develop opportunities for collaboration.

Finding Points of Contact for Collaborative Work

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The gap between student and academic affairs is well documented. Although originally, faculty members provided both academic and nonacademic support for students, disciplinary specialization and the growth of a higher education industry resulted in the division of these areas, with each functioning on either side of a widening chasm. Student affairs and academic affairs developed different understandings about the purposes of their work and how it should be measured. These differences and distinctions are clearly evident in the New England Resource Center for Higher Education's (NERCHE) think tanks for student and academic administrators.

NERCHE has been operating think tanks for chief student affairs officers, academic vice presidents and provosts, deans, and department chairs for over a decade. Think tank members are drawn from diverse institutions of higher education in New England—public and private, two- and four-year, rich and poor. Think tanks provide time and space for members to talk with one another about what they value and what impels them in their work and their lives. Each year NERCHE organizes a think tank around a series of topics that comprise a particular theme. Think tank members also work toward solutions for the compelling issues and problems they face in their work. Members have written articles together, presented at national conferences, and organized regional meetings on particular topics.

For NERCHE, think tank discussions provide key sources of intelligence on evolving trends, issues, and innovations. Through these discussions the center has come to understand that although the cultures and professional expectations of student affairs and academic affairs are markedly different, many of the issues they are confronting are the same.

For example, over the years, both academic and student affairs think tanks have discussed issues of assessment, technology, changing student populations, student retention, and general education. Occasionally, NERCHE has brought members of different think tanks together for rare opportunities to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. We have observed that discussions about creating partnerships have been artificial and stilted and have tended to focus on the obstacles toward collaboration. However, when one can identify issues that cross traditional boundaries or transcend functional dichotomies, it is possible to engage groups of academic and student affairs administrators in thinking about possibilities for collaboration. These are the overlapping issues that can link student affairs and academic affairs. Assessment, technology, changing student populations, student retention, and general education are some of the common issues. We examine here these issues and the collaborative structures or forms that various partnerships have taken.

Linking Issues

Assessment. It is clear from think tank discussions that no member of the campus community, whether academic or nonacademic staff, has been immune to the external pressures for accountability and the internal pressures for improved outcomes assessment. Critics of higher education deride the rising costs, use of teaching assistants, and systems of faculty tenure and sabbaticals. The higher education community's present preoccupation with assessment and measurement of outcomes is in part a response to those who are calling for colleges to serve students both efficiently and effectively. Both student and academic affairs must be able to demonstrate program worth and quality, programmatic strengths and weaknesses, and the contribution made to institutional mission and effectiveness (Schuh and Upcraft, 2001). Providing evidence of student learning and of the value added by a college education requires collaboration and coordination across traditional campus boundaries. Student affairs in particular has been slow to quantify its work in terms of outcomes. Since the publication and adoption of *The Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994), student affairs professionals have embraced student learning as a necessary programmatic outcome. The result of this initiative has been some noteworthy efforts to document the impact of student leadership experiences in clubs and organizations on students' cognitive development (Skeat and Hirt, 2001; Schuh and Laverty, 1983). Although faculty have expertise in assessing mastery over course content and concepts, they could benefit from the skills and preparation of student affairs professionals in the areas of social and ethical development and civic responsibility. Assessment instruments that can be administered by both student and academic affairs to document the quality of the undergraduate experience can help close the gap between

the two divisions. One such example is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which was designed to assess the extent to which students are participating in educational practices that are strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development (Bridges, Kuh, and O'Day, 2001). It can provide a meeting ground for discussion and action for academic and student affairs. Collaboration between student and academic affairs can be challenging, but it is crucial to develop shared goals for the students and a common understanding of the institution's mission.

Technology. The explosion in the forms and uses of technology has changed how subject matter is taught as well as the time and place where teaching and learning occurs. Moreover, the nature of technology on campus blurs the borders between administrative decisions and pedagogical decisions. Decision making surrounding technology has moved from issues related to academic support to those of strategic importance to the institution.

Addressing these issues in a competitive marketplace requires new cooperation and collaboration between academic and student affairs in order to focus campus discussion and decision making on technology as a way to further education and not as an end in itself. Technology should be used to serve the mission of the institution, and decisions about technology should reflect, not determine, institutional academic priorities. Technology will undoubtedly change how we think about education and how we deliver educational programs, but it is essential that academic leaders create an environment in which academic values remain in the forefront. The primary questions must focus on what an institution is seeking to achieve in teaching, research, and service. The secondary, but still highly significant, questions should address how technology can help achieve these goals and the ways in which an institution can—and will—create technology-based resources for its students, faculty, and staff. New partnerships across divisions are more critical than ever because it is no longer possible to separate academic from administrative technology; there are now important interconnections among academic technology, instructional support, and administrative system needs. Academic affairs administrators are looking to technology as a way to enliven the curriculum and pedagogy. Student affairs administrators talk about how technology can enhance campus life and community. Together, they must consider what this means in terms of academic policy, rules of student conduct, and effective use of resources.

Changing Student Population. Both academic and student affairs think tanks have discussed the impact of a changing student population on their institutions: the impact on curriculum, how courses are taught, and the kinds of academic and social support services that this new breed of students require. Today's students are more diverse in backgrounds, learning styles, and levels of preparedness. They carry their complex lives—family and work responsibilities—into the classroom. Not only is this generation

of students strikingly different than its predecessors, but today's faculties and student affairs staff are also no longer the homogenous group of years past. Unlike a generation ago, faculty and student affairs staff are less apt to be white, male, and native born. They are burdened by the constraints of two-career or single-parent families and often commute some distance to work. Thus, the need for collaboration across divisions has never been more necessary: college and university faculties are themselves experiencing new stresses and pressures in addition to having to teach a new generation of students different from themselves in their motivation and abilities to access and complete their education. Student affairs professionals often serve as resources for academic and planning committees for the institutions represented in the think tanks on the needs and issues of today's students. These include providing the latest information on immigration policy, ways to rethink outreach to same-sex parents of undergraduates, legal and ethical issues in dealing with students with psychological problems, and appropriate interventions for times of crisis.

Student Retention. The decline of the traditional college-age population during the 1980s and the competitive marketplace of new for-profit providers during the 1990s brought a new era of attention to and research on the retention of college students. Whereas student retention was once an ethical issue involving equal opportunity and access to higher education, loss of talent, and student waste of time and effort, retaining students has become a practical issue linked to the survival of many higher education institutions due to a declining pool of college-age students and a plethora of new providers and distance learning. Today's students have countless options available to them and have become better informed and more sophisticated consumers regarding the costs and benefits of acquiring a degree at a particular institution. Research on college dropouts has pointed to the importance of informal interaction between students and faculty as one of the major impacts on student persistence (Tinto, 1987). Whereas student retention has often fallen to student affairs, Tinto and others show that student success is often linked to a faculty member and the classroom. The competitive marketplace and a raft of empirical studies on the causes of student attrition have created a powerful incentive for collaboration between academic and student affairs. On one campus, this collaboration takes the form of integrated teams of faculty, advisers, residence-life staff, and others who meet regularly to discuss the status of students identified as at risk for dropping out. In this way, campus professionals are often able to intervene early to get students the necessary academic support or counseling to help them be successful students.

General Education. It seems that at any given time, most colleges and universities are in the process of reviewing their general education curriculum, have just completed reviewing it, or are contemplating a curricular overhaul. And whereas faculty have traditionally held reign over

course content and curricula, the general education program is a more collective endeavor, representing an overarching expression of what the college values and believes should be the hallmark of an educated person. As such, it can provide an opportunity for collaboration because no single group within the institution “owns” general education, and many of the skills and competencies identified with general education can be gained through experiences outside of the classroom (Banta and Kuh, 1998). For example, at one campus, the chief student affairs officer used the launch of a new general education program to stimulate a conversation between student and academic affairs about shared goals for students. The new academic curriculum was based on six learning objectives; student affairs staff used these objectives to examine how student activities outside of the classroom could also fulfill these learning goals. Student and academic affairs staff worked together on a companion document to the academic curriculum. The opportunity to rethink and renew the general education curriculum can provide academic and student affairs professionals with new ways of collaborating and coordinating expertise and knowledge to the benefit of student learning. By their very nature, conversations about what it means to be educated at a particular college or university need to be inclusive and expansive.

The Forms Partnerships Take

People do not usually collaborate unless they share common concerns and believe that they will be able to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively as a result. The aforementioned issues identified in both academic and student affairs think tanks provide substantive rationale for developing partnerships. These collaborations can vary from institution to institution and from partnership to partnership. However, as a whole, the collaborations between student and academic affairs tend to fall within one of three categories: structural, curricular, or programmatic. A discussion of these categories and some examples follow.

Organizational Structures. In most colleges and universities, student affairs and academic affairs occupy different organizational “silos” with separate and distinct hierarchies and reporting relationships. Even though the chief student affairs officer and the academic provost or vice president may each be a member of the president’s cabinet, sharing in the overall direction and oversight of the college, they often must compete with one another for institutional resources. However, some colleges and universities are rethinking this arrangement in order to address issues of financial pressures, technology, and the new diverse student population. They are reorganizing to try to capitalize on the strengths, similarities, and complementary capacities of both student and academic affairs. Ideally, the integration of student and academic affairs would be driven by the units themselves, but the need

to cut costs propels many restructuring efforts. This impetus for change inevitably creates resentments, but if the restructuring is carefully and inclusively managed, it can work. The new arrangements can team up people who, for structural reasons, have struggled against each other for resources. As a result, student and academic affairs can be linked. Institutional context and personalities aside, such structures offer new opportunities for mutual influence. For example, student affairs staff can work to help faculty become more student oriented, and faculty can help student affairs staff understand the ways in which they can contribute to student learning. On some campuses, a new professional position has been created to bridge the academic and student affairs areas. This hybrid professional, sometimes called a “learning specialist,” has combined expertise in learning theory and its applications, including Web-based and distance-learning technologies (Zeller, 1999) The learning specialist is skilled in working with students in a myriad of learning environments within and beyond classroom walls.

Other restructuring efforts connect various units within the academic and student affairs arenas that are complementary in focus and purpose. For example, the counseling center may be linked to the psychology or counseling departments. A center or program for international studies may be linked to international studies or foreign language departments. Yet another structural possibility for joining student and academic affairs can be achieved through the creative use of space. A student center, for example, can be built as a place where students’ academic and social needs are met so that learning is seen to occur both within and outside of the classroom. By housing offices for both faculty and student affairs staff under one roof, the chances abound for informal interaction that can seed future collaboration. One reason for this is that partnerships are often formed among individuals who have a relationship with one another. Shared space can foster the development of friendships and mutual respect among both academic and nonacademic colleagues.

Whatever the configuration, the leadership of an institution plays a critical role in both encouraging and rewarding collaborative efforts that are characterized by good communication and power sharing. Among think tank institutions these most often take the forms of joint cabinet positions, joint membership on key institutional committees, and shared roles in institutional strategic planning.

Curricular Innovations. A number of recent curricular offerings have created unique roles for faculty and student affairs staff to work together in ways that enhance student learning. Service learning offers one such opportunity for collaboration. Students who wish to work in community-based settings need assistance in finding suitable placements, as well as close supervision and opportunities for thoughtful reflection and connection to their academic learning. The time and effort required to find placements, monitor student learning, and integrate that learning into the classroom are

often more than a faculty member is able or prepared to give. In addition, goals of service-learning programs include the development of citizenship, social responsibility, and moral development—modes more closely identified with student affairs work. It is a natural extension for student affairs professionals who have had long experience with out-of-class learning through student internships, career planning, and community service to work in partnership with faculty to connect students' service with their courses and academic learning. On one campus a cocurricular transcript was developed for each student to capture the educational experiences that occur outside of the curriculum. Thus, a student gets "credit" for service-learning experiences that do not take place within the context of a course as well as for involvement and leadership in student organizations. Bridging the classroom with the out-of-class experiences redefines the parameters with which faculty and student affairs professionals work with one another. They become partners in the effort to support student learning.

Learning communities feature intentional groupings of students, coordinated scheduling, collaborative or cooperative learning techniques, and courses linked conceptually around common themes. Sometimes learning communities incorporate a living-learning or residential college component in which cohorts of students take a common set of courses and live in a residence or on a floor of a residence hall. Learning that begins in a classroom and extends to the dining hall, dorm room, and social activities creates a seamless intellectual experience for students. Several of the think tank members' campuses have used a variation of the learning community to create linked courses in which cohorts of students take classes that are developed along a certain theme. One campus designated a floor in one of the residence halls in which residential-life staff developed programs that complemented the material that students were learning in their courses. Faculty who taught in the program were invited to dine informally with the students on a regular basis. These campuses found that learning communities were an effective method for fostering collaborative learning environments in which both faculty and student affairs staff can contribute to and support the creation of vital and intellectual communities for students both in and out of the classroom. Not only do faculty and student affairs staff who become part of the learning community redefine and expand many of the traditional notions of their professional roles and responsibilities, but research indicates that students who participate in a learning community do better academically and are more likely to graduate (Pike, Schroeder, and Berry, 1997).

Programmatic Activities. A number of programmatic activities that support and enhance the academic, in-classroom learning experience have worked their way into many, if not most, campuses. These include orientation and first-year programs, leadership activities, and student programs that require intensive staff and faculty participation.

Freshman orientation and first-year programs are arenas in which academic and student affairs can collaborate to orient and support students entering an academic community. The trend on most campuses is to offer an orientation, often followed by a semester or yearlong course focused on a common academic experience along with practical skills and advice about becoming a successful student. Reflection is a critical component of these courses. One campus has found that these opportunities for reflection on the students' educational experiences—and most students report that their most powerful educational experiences take place outside of the classroom—help faculty connect curricular components with other educational goals. These courses provide opportunities for faculty members and student affairs staff to work together to plan, coordinate, and coteach small groups of students. In these settings faculty and student affairs staff often develop a greater understanding of and respect for the expertise each other brings to the institution. For student affairs staff this is especially important because they often feel that the institution devalues their work. These collaborations have a powerful impact on students in the form of increased student retention, improved academic performance, and stronger institutional affiliation.

Leadership programs provide another natural vehicle for collaboration. Skill-development workshops are often offered to student leaders to develop their capacity to run meetings, budget, and manage finances, in addition to public speaking and team building. When faculty are enlisted to participate in these programs, students can gain a richer understanding of leadership theory and styles, as well as the organizational psychology of groups (Fried, 1999). These same leadership programs in turn often provide the campus with a pool of students who can ably serve on college and university committees.

Student activities, clubs, and organizations are traditionally areas in which faculty involvement and participation have been sporadic and haphazard at best. These groups have had to rely on those faculty with a special interest in the organization or in relating to students in out-of-class activities. As noted previously, this practice continues despite the research on student retention and persistence that supports the involvement of faculty with students in out-of-class experiences. Still, there is great potential for faculty and student affairs to interact and collaborate so that students' out-of-class time not only supports classroom learning but also extends and expands it. Traditionally, there have been real obstacles beyond time and interest to faculty participation. A reward system that fails to recognize their participation provides a strong disincentive for faculty to become involved in student activities. In fact, this system may penalize them for their involvement. Thus it is crucial that as collaborative activities are developed, they must be meaningful, relevant, and rewarding for both the faculty member and the students.

Conclusion

NERCHE's academic and student affairs think tanks have raised many of the important issues with which institutions of higher education are grappling. As they respond to the many pressures that are being applied from both outside and inside the academy, the academic and student affairs professionals who formerly occupied either of these distinct areas are now spending more time in the corridors between these two divisions—sharing interests and responsibilities in ways they never have before. Coexistence can no longer be the goal; instead, academic and student affairs must find new ways of relating and working together in order to meet the specific challenges presented by new and different students, new technologies, and new providers—all of which have changed where and how postsecondary education is delivered. Remaining competitive, and indeed surviving in this changed landscape, requires openness, flexibility, and innovative strategies and structures for working across divisions toward the goal of an enhanced learning environment for students. Each professional brings to the table specialized knowledge and skills. What they share is a common goal of student learning. With that in mind, they need to develop an appreciation for the complementary roles they play in the education process. When they do this, they discover firsthand what the college impact research shows—that cognitive and affective development are inextricably intertwined (Banta and Kuh, 1998).

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