

Reflecting on Student Affairs in Higher Education

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Author Note

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I always struggled to find history that seemed relatable to my everyday life. Throughout my prior educational experiences, I dreaded history courses because I was consumed with worry about the need to memorize dates, years, and “significant events.” That said, when I first found out that this course was intended to give us the historical foundations of the field, I was slightly intimidated since I was primarily concerned about my engagement in the course. Throughout the semester, however, I’ve found that this course has become essential in my development as a professional. Through assignments such as the book review, I have gained a strong sense of the field, learned ways in which this can impact day to day practice and developed a sense of ethics and values for the profession, all while improving my ability to articulate these theories and actions into my writing and practice (PLO 1, PLO 2, PLO 4, PLO 8).

One of my primary concerns when starting this program was my ability to consolidate theory with practice. When I first started my graduate assistantship at San Diego State University (SDSU) in Student Life and Leadership, our director, Randy Timm, indicated that this would be one of the most important pieces we would need to learn and master throughout our time as graduate assistants. With that piece of information in mind, I started noticing that while I had a passion for learning theory and engaging in practice, I did little work to consolidate the two elements of my learning. Through books like that of Upcraft and Schuh (1996), I learned the importance of theory, but didn’t have an opportunity to directly understand how that might impact practice. I knew it was important to conduct assessment, but there wasn’t always an answer to how I should be conducting it. Through the process of this book review, it became important to think about how I could tie what I was reading into my practice as a professional. In the reading, Love and Estanek (2004) provided specific ways in which the theories and philosophies introduced could be tied into the work of professionals. This reading then informed

my scholastic writing in understanding that while explaining one's ideologies are important, it is equally important to provide an understanding of the impact and how it can be translated into other professionals' work.

Throughout this process, it was also critical for me to consider the ethics of the field, as the book challenged a lot of the traditional thought processes common in student affairs. Specifically, through challenging the idea of dualisms, the authors provide a new way of considering information and challenges in the practice. For example, instead of thinking of the opposite of truth as a lie, the authors challenge us to consider the opposition of truth—it being the ultimate correct perspective—to be truth, so that each perspective holds validity through its own lens. Through these exercises, ethics must be reconsidered in practice and situations can be framed in completely different circumstances, depending on how one is viewing the situation. This became impactful in my practice, as I was working with students who were engaging in hazing activities toward their new members. It became helpful to see that while the actions were hurtful and needed correction, the students' hazing wasn't necessarily bad, but rather needed a shift in perspective, as they saw hazing as an acceptable way of developing community.

That said, the book review provided the powerful understanding and reconsideration that student affairs professionals are considered a resource in the field as well, a thought that was new to me. While I had brief experiences as a project manager and assigning individual team members as a "resource" to projects, it was a new idea to consider this as a new professional in this field. Perhaps it is because I'm only a graduate assistant and the considerations of a director might be different, but an understanding of time as a resource was a new thought that helped me reconsider how I utilize my time at work and how I might utilize and assign it as a resource.

This assignment also provided insight into what it might mean to be a good student affairs professional. Through the process of reading and gaining new perspective, I discovered

the importance of constantly staying on top of new publications and broadening my points of view. I came to value the process of reading and creating dialogue, thus, it was particularly helpful to have an opportunity to debrief the assignment with the professor and fellow classmates to get other opinions of the issues discussed in the literature. This process has informed what being a “scholarly practitioner” means to me, as well as how I want to practice in the future as a full time professional in the field.

References

Love, P., & Estanek, S. (2004). *Rethinking student affairs practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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