Interchange

Commission for Student Involvement Newsletter
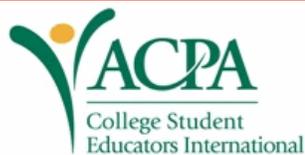
A Word from the Chair

What's Inside:

Hello Commission Members:

The fall term challenged us with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and flooding in the Northeast. Some of you experienced the disasters first hand and others assisted with the relief and support efforts. Many campuses welcomed students from the affected areas, completed food and clothing drives, sent out volunteers, or conducted fundraisers. Please keep those directly affected and those aiding in relief efforts in your thoughts. If you haven't donated already, you can donate at www.redcross.org or to one of the many other charities. Discussions on how student affairs offices supported relief efforts will be found in the coming months.

This edition of Interchanges offers some great opportunities for involvement and research. Inside you will find information on joining the Commission Directorate. Directorate members are the voting body that represent the commission, provide leadership, and create a vision. Second, you will find information on research grants. The Commission is pleased to offer up to two research grants. This is a great opportunity for graduate students, faculty, and staff to advance the research in the student involvement area. Please take advantage of these $500 research grants.

The annual ACPA Convention will be March 18th - 22nd in the great city of Indianapolis. I hope to see you at convention!

Jason Schreiber, Chair
Director of Student Activities, University of San Diego

ACPA
College Student
Educators International

The Leadership Corner:

Creating a Baseline for Leadership Education

By Adam Foley

Colleges and universities aspire to graduate students who will succeed in careers (Braxton, Smart, & Thieke, 1991; Erwin, 1991; Quinn, 2004). In attempting to accomplish this, they have examined what skills and experiences employers' value so that they can promote development of those skills and experiences among their students. Numerous skills and experiences have been identified as important to employers, depending on field of study, such as reading, writing, creative thinking, personal management, group effectiveness, organizational effectiveness and leadership (Kerka, 1990; Mittelhauser, 1998; Attinasi, 1992). Many employers specifically seek skills that have been associated with leadership (Gale, 2002; Gerber, 2003; Kerka; Santosus, 2003; Stronge, 1998). As a result, college and universities have introduced curricular (Freeman, Knott, & Schwartz, 1994; Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003) and cocurricular (Freeman, et al.; Posner & Brodsky, 1993) programs designed to train students on those leadership skills. A great deal of human and fiscal resources are devoted to developing leadership skills among students, but how do campuses know where to begin when it comes to creating and implementing leadership development programs? Little research has been done to look at baseline leadership skills that students possess when they matriculate.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on leadership skills in the general population revealed research on different groups of individuals. A large body of work looks at the leadership skills of educators and other world leaders (Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Cooke, 1989; Gardner, 1995; Gehrke, 2001; Langbort, 2001; McFarland, Senn, & Children, 1993; Thornton, Langrall, Jones, & Swafford, 2001). More specifically, the leadership skills of elementary children, as well as the teachers that work with them have been discussed (Hensel, 1991; Karnes & Bean, 1990; Wade & Putnam, 1995).

The literature on leadership skills also has focused on college students (Chambers, 1992; Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994; Cox & Miranda, 2003; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Gardner, 1990; Graham & Cockriel, 1997; Romero-Aldaz, 2001; Skeat, 2000; Striffolino & Saunders, 1988; Turrentine, 2001). This has been due in great part to the belief that the development of leadership skills is a primary responsibility of higher education. This has led to research on the power of developing leadership skills for the purposes of experiential education and social development (Gardner, 1990). Additionally, research on self-management, problem-solving, cognitive development, and organization (Cress et al., 2001; Striffolino & Saunders, 1988), as well as interpersonal skills (Cooper et al., 1994) have all been explored as skills associated with leadership.

Overall, research shows that involvement in student organizations while in college has a positive affect on students' total academic experience (Cooper et al., 1994; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). However, student leaders remain an understudied group of college students (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). In general, the research currently available measures the outcomes of students' participation in college. However, the literature is clear that students develop skills throughout their K-12 education. Thus, it would seem important to measure college students' skills at the time of college matriculation so those who promote leadership skills in college know where to start.

Methods

A study was conducted to examine the leadership skills that first-year students possess at the time they arrive at college. Leadership skills were defined as self-management, interpersonal skills, problem-solving/decision-making abilities, cognitive development/critical analysis skills, organization and planning abilities, self-confidence, diversity awareness, and technology skills. More specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are the pre-college leadership skills of first-year students?
2. Are there differences in pre-college leadership skills of first-year students by race?
3. Are there differences in pre-college leadership skills of first-year students by gender?
4. Are there differences in pre-college leadership skills of first-year students based on the interaction between race and gender?

Data for this study were collected through an online administration of the Student Leadership Outcomes Inventory (SLOI) (Vann, 2000). Items ask respondents to rate the degree to

> **"How do campuses know where to begin when it comes to creating and implementing leadership development programs?"**

which they believe they developed each of 60 skills as a result of their leadership experiences in high school. A total of 279 respondents participated in the study. They were chosen from a population of traditional aged (i.e., 18-19 years old), first-year students at a large, public, research institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Results

Students reported moderately high levels of leadership skills on all eight scales measured. These scores were coupled with high standard deviations. The means and standard deviations for the eight scales were: a) self management ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .74$); b) interpersonal skills ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .72$); c) problem-solving and decision-making ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .84$); d) cognitive development and critical analysis ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .75$); e) organization and planning ($M = 4.39$, $SD = .79$); f) self-confidence ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .84$); g) diversity ($M = 4.82$, $SD = .96$); and h) technology ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.23$).

Overall, differences by race were not revealed. However, differences in leadership skills related to technology were found between men and women in general, and in particular, White male and White female respondents, serving as further evidence of the gender gap present in technology. It would seem that students matriculate with some intact leadership skills. Administrators might use this baseline when designing leadership development opportunities for students.

Implications

The present study had several important implications for practice. The findings of this study suggest that students have a wide range of leadership skills upon matriculating into college. Although many students scored far above the average mean, others still scored far below on each of the eight scales. As a result, programs cannot be designed with one type of student or skill set in mind. Leadership program coordinators should be aware that some students will have higher skill levels and can help educate other students in the program. Such an approach helps to build self-confidence and support the development of further leadership skills.

Additionally, professionals working with leadership development may be informed by this study. The present study revealed moderately high scores on the eight scales measured. This would suggest that students come to college already possessing many introductory leadership skills. As a result, professionals could work to design leadership programs to focus on a broader range of leadership topics, such as community development, service-learning, ethics and morality, and global leadership.

Professionals who focus on program development could also benefit from this study as it informs the potential direction of their programs. Due to the increased leadership skills that students are entering college with, they may benefit more from establishing connections between their leadership and the world around them. Providing lectures and other information from the standpoint of professionals in other fields would help students connect what they are learning to their overall academic focus.

Additionally, findings support prior research (Brunner, 1997) that identified a technology gap between male and female students. Previous research indicates that female students buy into technology more when they are able to understand how it relates to their interests or tasks (Brunner). Professionals working with leadership development should make a strong effort to relate their leadership lessons to the interests and tasks of the students they serve. This would facilitate closing the gender gap related to technology.

College administrators, as well as leadership program coordinators, might also consider setting a higher standard for leadership education given students' pre-existing knowledge upon entering college and likely ability to meet that standard. This study suggests that students are entering college with moderately high leadership skills. So, if administrators wish to graduate students with higher levels of leadership skills, they should challenge students in all areas of their college experience. This can be done by encouraging those responsible for educating students to engage students in leadership endeavors and to reward those who do engage students.

College administrators who advocate leadership as one outcome of their institution may use these findings. Administrators need to assess leadership skills upon entering college and then upon exiting college in order to assure that the resources allocated to such programs are adequate and are producing the desired outcomes, increased leadership skills. This research provides a strong measure by which to control for existing development in college outcomes research.

In this study, race and gender were analyzed in relation to the leadership skills measured. However, high school type and location were not analyzed. Future research should look at high school type and location in order to gauge whether students from certain types of high schools report higher leadership skills than students from other types of high schools. Additionally, this study took place at a large, research institution. Future studies should expand on these data to examine the pre-college leadership skills of first-year students at other institutional types (e.g., community

> **"The findings of this study suggest that students have a wide range of leadership skills upon matriculating into college."**

colleges, liberal arts institutions, religious institutions). This would provide a more complete picture of the overall leadership skills of matriculating students. Finally, although the respondents in this study consisted of both men and women, it is possible that the questions on the instrument favored stereotypically male leadership characteristics. Future studies should seek to identify women's leadership characteristics and identify any differences that may emerge by sex. This would provide a more complete definition of leadership skills from which to assess students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal moderately high levels of leadership skills among first-year college students. However, these skills vary fairly dramatically within one standard deviation, indicating that some students come to college having gained far more leadership skills than others. It is vital that institutions of higher education take note of this study and support future studies that expand on its findings. Doing so will ensure that leadership is not merely a common promise in higher education, but a common practice.

"Due to the increased leadership skills that students are entering college with, they may benefit more from establishing connections between their leadership and the world around them."

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The Service Corner:

Using Civic Engagement at a Community College to Develop Community Leaders

By Mirna Mejia & Byron Clift Breland

The community college is an innovation to higher education in the United States (O'Banion, 1989). These institutions are also known as "two-year colleges" and they do not confer bachelor's, graduate or professional degrees. Nonetheless, community colleges are poised to offer an education that fits the needs of individual learners, and their respective communities. To that end, a number of creative programs have arisen to address the unique needs of their host communities. As a community college, Santa Ana College is committed to innovative and nontraditional programming that joins with the efforts of local community-based organizations.

An example of such a program came about in 2004, when Santa Ana College was chosen as one of nine community colleges in California awarded a 3-year AmeriCorps Foster Youth Mentoring Project (FYMP) grant through the Foundation for California Community Colleges. AmeriCorps is considered the nation's domestic PeaceCorps and focuses on engaging individuals in "getting things done" in their communities. The AmeriCorps FYMP recruits Santa Ana College students to serve as mentors to foster youth from Orange County, CA. This particular AmeriCorps program is unique in its nature, in that it is specifically designed to provide mentoring to foster youth, a population that has distinct and special needs. As such, mentors provide essential one-on-one and group mentoring to foster youth ages 14-18.

As an academic component to the program, members are required to enroll in *Human Development 260 and 261: Mentoring Adolescents*, to receive ongoing training on topics such as working with foster youth, developing trust, the foster care system and social services, developing goals with foster youth, and confidentiality. In addition, mentors undergo a series of screenings to ensure their suitability for the program. Once they have completed the background screenings and the majority of the training sessions, mentors are matched with a foster youth mentee. The matches are conducted jointly with the AmeriCorps program coordinator and the Social Services Agency liaison.

The program is intended to recruit 39 members to provide mentoring to 39 foster youth. Mentoring takes place over 12 months, with mentors providing approximately 6-10 hours of mentoring per week. Mentoring focuses on developing and increasing life skills and independent living skills of foster youth towards the larger goal of successfully emancipating from foster care. During the one year term-of-service, mentors commit to completing at least 450 program hours. At the completion of the program, mentors are eligible to receive an educational award of $1,250 from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), which administers the AmeriCorps program on a national level.

The AmeriCorps FYMP provides an excellent opportunity for Santa Ana College students to engage in service to the community, while at the same time, receive financial assistance with their future educational expenses. Through participation in the program, students have the opportunity to engage in service that promotes civic responsibility, as well as gain valuable skills such as developing interpersonal relationships, leadership abilities, and helping others. It also provides an opportunity for them to be involved in addressing the needs of youth in their community by serving as a role model to a child in foster care. Other positive outcomes of the program include the development and subsequent strengthening of relationships between community-based agencies and Santa Ana College. By enhancing these partnerships, the educational and social needs of the community can be better served by both the agency and college.

Given the nature of the program, there are also some distinctive challenges to be encountered at the community college level. Two of the primary challenges experienced at Santa Ana College were the initial recruitment of members and their retention in the pro-

gram for the one-year commitment. For both of these, it seems that the actual length (one year) and hour commitment (450 hours) of the program may serve to prevent students from joining at the onset and hinder their persistence in the program throughout the course of the year. In some cases, for example, the student could not continue their participation in the program while being a full-time student, working an off-campus job and/or also fulfilling family obligations. Even though students may be enthusiastic about mentoring a foster youth and have honest intentions to participate in the FYMP program, the reality is that many of them may become overwhelmed by the responsibility of managing other competing demands on their time.

Overall, the AmeriCorps Foster Youth Mentoring Project is an exemplary program that serves to provide both leadership and service opportunities to mentors as well as create a supportive, nurturing connection for foster youth in the community. As a leadership development opportunity for community college students, the FYMP program offers its participants a unique venue to make a direct impact on the Santa Ana community. Moreover, Santa Ana is a thriving and vibrant city with many opportunities for its residents to engage in leadership activities that promote civic education and awareness.

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This article was co-authored by Mirna Mejia and Dr. Byron Clift Breland. Ms. Mejia is the Program Coordinator for the AmeriCorps Foster Youth Mentoring Project and Guardian Scholars Programs as well as adjunct instructor at Santa Ana College. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Education with a concentration in Multicultural Counseling. Dr. Byron Clift Breland is the Associate Dean of Student Development at Santa Ana College and holds a doctorate degree in Counseling Psychology.

RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Commission for Student Involvement is proud to announce that we will be offering up to two Research Grants this coming academic year. Each grant recipient will receive an award of $500 as well as having their research paper published on the Commission website.

We are looking for both qualitative and quantitative research that has a direct relation to one or more of CSI's four involvement areas: Leadership, Greek Life, Student Activities, and Service Learning. Grant winners will be announced at the CSI meeting at the ACPA Convention in Indianapolis this March.

Research Grant guidelines and submission information can be acquired by e-mailing Seth Fishman, Vice-Chair for Research, at fishman@fau.edu. Applications are due by December 2, 2005.

SUBMIT AN ARTICLE TO INTERCHANGE

Interchange is published four times a year and distributed to hundreds of members of the ACPA community. Articles should address one of the four areas of the Commission of Student Involvement (Greek Life, Leadership Development, Community Service, Student Organizations). Original research, book reviews, and critical essays are all accepted. This is a fantastic way to turn a paper you've written into a quick publication!

Submissions for the January/ February issue are due by January 9th. Articles should not exceed 1,500 words. For more information and specific regarding content and format please contact the Interchange Editor, John Dugan, at dugan@umd.edu.

The Student Organization Corner:

Connecting Culturally Specific Approaches to Advising Practices: A Quick Model for Student Affairs Practice
By Toby Jenkins & Clayton Walton

This article is adapted from longer versions appearing in the Journal of College & Character and NASPA Leadership Exchange.

How do we serve an ever-changing and diverse student community? All over the country, student affairs practitioners pose this question to themselves, to their colleagues, and often to students. Many professionals that are charged with serving students of color are new professionals, graduate students, or veteran professionals all of whom are having similar problems identifying innovative programs, creative initiatives, and new advising strategies to reach and to serve today's cultural populations. Co-curricular practitioners must be more than sounding boards for student leaders and move towards creating effective institutional programs that educate culturally specific students outside of the classroom so that they may successfully face the challenges of American society both during and after their collegiate experience. This, however, is not easily achieved. The student affairs practitioner is faced with filled calendar days, multiple job responsibilities, competing professional interests, and multiple student communities that are all calling for help—often at the same time. Consequently, most days leave little time to thoughtfully plan and to intentionally create a strategy of practice—a framework that drives program and service delivery. Most days we just need to get things done.

This article renews the sense of importance that the student affairs practitioner holds as a co-curricular, cultural educator and offers a model of cultural program development that practitioners can use in establishing a cultural programming framework. It is vital that in the whirlwind of the day, practitioners do not lose sight of educational potential and the increasing need to be intentional and holistic in our service to students, even when we are serving a particular dimension such as cultural development. We must fully approach cultural development to ensure that a holistic cultural program portfolio is offered to students. Our model is a quick and easy approach to framing cultural development service. This model was initially created and utilized during our tenure at a university Black cultural center [thus the programmatic examples focus on students of the African Diaspora]. However, we have also used its framework in our broader service to multicultural communities. The model provides a viable structure that can be adopted to implement university cultural programming for both individual cultural populations and multiple cultural communities of students. With a strong portfolio of culturally focused educational/identity, personal/leadership, and engagement/social experiences, institutions of higher learning can ultimately promote and contribute to the cultural leadership development of students of color. That is, we can make inroads in growing student cultural agency, cultural

The Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioners Model
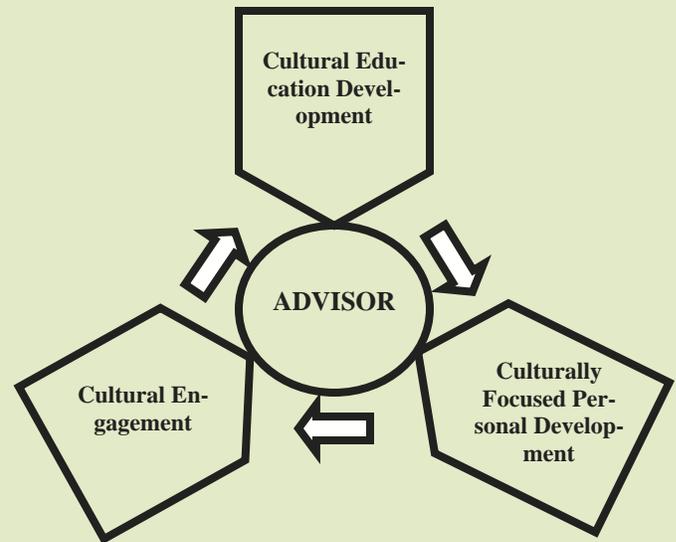
identity, and more importantly cultural connectedness and service to underrepresented communities as social change agents (Finkesltein, 1998; Karenga, 1966; UCLA, 1996)

The Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioners Model (TCP) provides a multi-layered approach to creating institutional programming for student leaders of color that focuses on encouraging their personal, cultural, and social development. The model identifies three sectors that may be critical in the holistic development of the student leader of color. These sectors include the Cultural Education Development Sector [focusing on cultural history and identity], the Culturally Focused Personal Development Sector [focusing on cultural leadership and civic engagement], and the Cultural Engagement Sector [focusing on culturally reflective forms of social expression].

The advisor or practitioner is the centerpiece of the model as a programmer and is connected to all three of the sectors keeping them in motion. We consider an "advisor" to be any professional, faculty or staff member who serves as a co-curricular resource to a student organization or whose primary university charge is to serve multicultural communities outside of the classroom and within the student activities, multicultural affairs, cultural center, or leadership development arena. The most critical aspect of the model is that it encourages an active role on the part of the institution and the advisor as an institutional agent. In sharing both the model's programming conceptual framework as well

as examples of campus programs that we have implemented utilizing this model, we hope to provide a viable and adoptable framework for student affairs cultural practitioners.

Sector I: Cultural Education Development

It is first important to understand and acknowledge intra-cultural diversity, particularly when considering service to individual cultural communities. Diversity is present throughout all cultural Diasporas and programs need to be constructed that allow students to learn the vast cultural, historical, and social differences within and throughout cultural communities [African, Latino, Asian, European, Middle Eastern, etc.] as well as immerse themselves in learning about their cultural selves.

Below is an example of one of the programs that we created for students that illustrate what this cultural educational immersion could look like:

Cultural Journeys:

"I cried when we visited the plantation. It was so real. I'm an African American studies major and I have read a lot about black history. But the plantation was so real." Student Participant

Each year students had an opportunity to participate in an educational immersion of their cultural or racial history. Journeys have included a program entitled "Get on the Bus" which was a cultural immersion trip to South Carolina. This program was constructed to provide additional opportunities for students to learn about Black history in the south, particularly as it relates to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Students participated in a two day program that allowed them to experience life on the plantation, participate in a Gullah Tour of the city, and engage in dinner discussions on Black history and culture with educators within the city of Charleston, SC.

Another journey took place as part of an Alternative Spring Break Collaborative program with Hillel. Jewish and Black students went on a sponsored trip to Tennessee to provide a cross-cultural immersion program designed to educate students on Jewish and Black history in the South. The program focused not only on providing students historical learning through museum visits, local history tours, synagogue visits, and discussions, but also to

> **"Opportunities to understand how their cultural experiences and values impact their leadership practice are critical to the healthy leadership development of students of color."**

introduce them to contemporary issues affecting both communities through daily community service activities.

Sector II: Cultural Engagement

Cultural engagement programs are those social opportunities for students to engage and to celebrate culture. One such program, The Juke Joint was created in the tradition of the "Juke Joint" social venues created for and by African Americans during the American period of social segregation. This program was designed to provide students of the African Diaspora, who continue to experience isolation at predominately white institutions, a cultural safe space to network, socialize, and express their creative and literary talents. The primary component of the social program was an open-mike poetry hour, which was accompanied by a DJ and free food. What made this program not simply a social occasion, but also a learning experience was the incorporation of historical facts, pictures of Juke Joints, and historical information on African American entertainment. The goal of the program was not only to provide students of color a present day social outlet, but to link their present need for social inclusiveness to a very similar history of social exclusion outside of the institution.

Sector III: Culturally Focused Personal Development [Leadership & Civic Development]

Opportunities to understand how their cultural experiences and values impact their leadership practice are critical to the healthy leadership development of students of color. Additionally, learning strong leadership practice through studying leaders that physically reflect and culturally embody the values of students of color is also essential. We have created multiple culturally based leadership development programs under this sector; here we highlight two particularly successful programs.

Cultural Leadership Institute

"I was surprised to see how many African-American students I did not know. I have developed long-lasting relationships with most of them. I learned about their organizations and even got involved…it has helped my adjustment to this campus." Student Participant

"The interaction with this group [leadership series], and learning about them, and learning to love them, was the best thing about [the program]. Student Participant

The Cultural Leadership Institute is a semester-long, culturally-based leadership experience that is theoretically based on the leadership and cultural theories of the Higher Education Research Institute's social change model of leadership (1996), Karenga's principles of Kwanzaa (1966), Finkelstein's approach

to evaluating cultural education programs (1998), and the leadership praxis and theories of several leaders of color. Through sessions participants are exposed to leadership models and practices of past leaders of color and provided opportunities to explore current challenges for college student leaders, current leadership needs of various cultural communities and participate in broad culturally focused leadership experiences outside of the campus community. The institute critically examines the theoretical dimensions and practical applications of culturally based leadership. It is comprised of five core modules: Culture's Influence on Leadership, Servant Leadership, Cultural Value Oriented Organizational Management, College Connectedness, Cultural Leaders on Campus & Beyond. The leadership growth outcomes have resulted in the presidents of almost every major student organization of color participating in the series prior to their acquiring such a leadership role. From honors organizations to cultural organizations, from professional societies to Greek-lettered organizations, student government members and students not belonging to an organization, the leadership series attracts a variety of student leaders.

Campus Conversations

"Campus Conversations is an important program because it has allowed me to meet important people on campus that I never knew. I feel important when I attend the meetings. I feel like I'm making a change on campus." Student Participant

This series was constructed to provide students of African descent an opportunity to meet and to develop relationships with administrative leaders on campus (e.g., President, Provost, Vice President of Student Affairs, Department Directors) as well as to practice their leadership skills. Facilitated by a professional staff member, the program allowed student leaders to be informed of new and changing campus diversity initiatives and resources as well as an opportunity to provide administrators feedback and suggestions on the needs of students of color. Campus Conversations was an essential university-driven program that proactively assisted student organizations of color in maintaining an active involvement in institutional change, which is their cultural leadership legacy.

So what is the answer?

Intentional, purposeful, and educational approaches to diversity are part of the solution. As demonstrated in the Tri-Sector Cultural Practitioners Model, the advisor's role as a campus programmer is multi-dimensional, serving as a bridge to connect students to their cultural community, an educator to provide co-curricular, cultural education programs, and a leadership consultant to assist with the cultural student organization's growth. It is important that advisors continually renew their understanding of the present needs of today's student populations of color and challenge their own commitment to professional innovation.

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The Student Organization Corner:

Political and Religious Polarization and the Double Standard: Are Conservative Student Groups Being Ostracized?
By Sarah M. Clegg

The current political and socio-religious climate has become polarized in recent years (Nivola, 2005). This is evidenced by the election of George W. Bush to a second term in the White House and Republicans dominating the House and Senate with the strong support of conservative religious organizations. According to a journalistic report (Nivola, 2005), the national turn toward the political right has the potential to create a polarized society in which moderate politics and middle of the road thinking becomes increasingly rare.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, increased nationalism and patriotism has become the norm (Alworth, 2005), and the once-apathetic student body is taking a more active interest in politics. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), in their report on National Norms for Fall 2004, stated that there is a drop in the number of incoming students declaring themselves "middle of the road" and an increase in students identifying as either "liberal" or "conservative" (Jacobson, 2004). There is also a spike in the number of students declaring their orientation to the "far left" or the "far right" (Jacobson). This comes with a rise in the number of students who consider it important to "keep up to date with political affairs" (Jacobson). These events have widened the divide between the left and the right in our country, and have brought religion and politics to the forefront of the battles over freedom of expression and support for student organizations.

For student affairs professionals, this socio-political shift is impossible to ignore. Those involved in student organizations and advising student groups may be called upon to make tough decisions and resolve conflicts surrounding sensitive issues. A number of relevant questions emerge for those involved in student organizations. What draws students to become involved in these groups? Why is membership growing so fast? As conservative student groups grow and become more visible and active on campuses, will this have any effect on students' decisions to become involved? And lastly, will conservative groups (particularly those based on religious beliefs) have any effect on the way that professionals involved in campus activities provide service to students? The possibly implications of this socio-political shift could be a return of the 'culture wars' of the past.

> **"The national turn toward the political right has the potential to create a polarized society in which moderate politics and middle of the road thinking becomes increasingly rare."**

Campus Interest in Politics

The political leanings of faculty have always been widely known, with the general consensus being that most faculty members are liberal (Williams, 2004). Studies show Democratic faculty far outnumbers Republicans in most academic areas (Williams, 2004). As the current political climate changes, this fact plays a role in conflict between students and faculty and among the faculty themselves. In 2001-2002, HERI conducted a survey of 55,000 faculty members in which 48% identified themselves as liberal, 34% as moderate, and only 18% as conservative (Jacobson, 2004). It is clear that both student and faculty political leanings can and will have an effect on the overall political climate of an institution.

Culture Wars and Student Organizations

In the 1960s and 70s, cultural wars were fought over racial issues, women's rights and the war in Vietnam (Stimpson, 2002). The 1990s saw a return of the university as a cultural battleground as the era of political correctness took hold and higher education was challenged to diversify and provide multicultural experiences for students. There now seems to be a resurgence of cultural struggles, this time surrounding political and religious issues. The rise in political polarization has led to an increase in political activism on campus (Anthes, 2003), particularly in the conservative or right wing sector of the student population. Current situations call to mind the 1995 case of *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia* (Kaplin & Lee, 1997), in which the Supreme Court ruled that student funds at a public institution could not be denied to religious organizations.. In recent years, conservative religious and political students and student organizations came forward to expose these perceived biases (Dean, 2004). Some students have argued that preferential treatment is given to groups who support a more liberal or non-Christian agenda. For example, in 2004 the College Republican group at University of North Carolina, Greensboro was denied funding for an event featuring a pro-Christianity speaker (Dean, 2004). They were also denied funding for a "Morals Week" pro-

gram, which they planned to hold during the school-funded "Gay Pride" week. After complaints were received, the College Republicans did receive funding from the school, but were denied the right to advertise the event. According to the group's president, Travis Billingsley, the school does not allow "political groups" to advertise on campus. Billingsley also revealed that there was only one such "political group" on campus, the College Republicans (Dean, 2004).

> **"The number of students joining religious groups on campus continues to rise at a staggering pace."**

Fighting Back

Students in this small but growing group with conservative political leanings now find that they have organized support. The Students for Academic Freedom is a national coalition of campus organizations dedicated to "restoring academic freedom and educational values" by eradicating "political abuse" in the university (http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/). The organization's creator, David Horowitz, also authored the Academic Bill of Rights which is designed to force faculty and administrators to adopt a wider range of political and social beliefs as they deal with students. Horowitz (2005) believes professors are meant to teach students *how* to think, not *what* to think. While liberal and conservative organizations alike claim that the Academic Bill of Rights imposes political standards and limits the freedom of speech, Republican leaders have drafted a proposal to rework into the Higher Education Act, making diverse viewpoints inside and outside of the classroom mandatory (Klein, 2004). At the state level, the document has been used as a template for lawmakers in Georgia, Missouri and Colorado, with other states vowing to adopt similar standards (Marklien, 2004). The president of the Colorado State Senate has asked the state's 29 public institutions to specify the steps they will take to handle charges of bias and the promotion of intellectual diversity (Hebel, 2004).

Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes

From academic advising to counseling, conflict resolution to campus activities, issues of political and religious discrimination can and will arise. Student affairs staff must be prepared to handle and respond to these issues. What skills and knowledge are necessary to adequately manage these issues while still promoting student learning and development?

Proper assessment of the issue is essential. Pascarella and Teranzini's 1991 review of college student affairs literature (as cited in Lowery & Coomes, 2003) reports a distinct lack of research on religion and values in the student population. However, the number of students joining religious groups on campus continues to rise at a staggering pace (Lowery & Coomes, 2003). With no way of knowing how this political/religious polarization affects the campus community as a whole, it is in the best interest of student affairs professionals to have a real understanding of where the campus divides on the issue. Assessments of the faculty, administration and student body could provide information helpful in identifying programming needs.

On a personal level, self knowledge is necessary. In order to identify any personal biases, it is necessary to have a firm understanding of what you believe and where you stand on the issues. As student affairs professionals, it will always be a challenge to accept students where they are, as opposed to where we want them to be in terms of their beliefs and values. It is to be expected that the struggles of some students may seem more important than others, but individual opinions on matters outside of student and institutional welfare should not factor into the decision-making process. Understanding personal biases is an important step in keeping that natural preferential treatment in check.

Lastly, it is essential to become well informed. In academic environments, it is often possible to become insulated and isolated in our worldview, often not seeing outside the boundaries of the school itself. To deal with this future trend in higher education, one skill that cannot be overlooked is being well informed on national and global issues. An awareness of what is going on in the 'real world' will allow professionals to develop the insight to be able to recognize which issues might have an effect on the campus and develop into inflammatory events.

> **"From academic advising to counseling, conflict resolution to campus activities, issues of political and religious discrimination can and will arise."**

Conclusion

Higher Education will always provide a window into the political and social climate of our country. Students will always reflect the growing trends and changes in society. As it

becomes evident that a growing number of students find solidarity and a sense of belonging in conservative student organizations, it falls to student affairs professionals to help ensure that these student groups receive fair and equal treatment in terms of funding, publicity and acceptance into the community of campus activities.

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Commission Connections:

ACPA Established Commission for Social Justice Educators

By Keith E. Edwards

I'm excited to take this opportunity to introduce members of the Commission on Student Involvement to your newest ACPA partner, the newly established Commission for Social Justice Educators (CSJE).

The CSJE is a group of student affairs professionals from a variety of social identities interested in a wide variety of social justice issues in higher education and social justice education. Just as there are ACPA Commissions for functional areas within student affairs such as student involvement, residence life, and academic support it was time for a structure for those of us whose student affairs jobs as well as professional identities are centered on issues of social justice. Whether you are a staff member in campus activities, multicultural affairs, a GLBT office, leadership programs, or other student affairs functional areas, this commission will be a place for you to join with others committed to issues of social justice to gain support and collaboration improving our practice and scholarship of social justice in student affairs.

The Commission for Social Justice Educators' mission is to provide a collaborative home for college student educators working in the areas of diversity and social justice education. ACPA has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to multiculturalism and social justice by actively supporting a diversity of ideas and identities within its membership and member institutions. This commission reinforces and focuses that commitment by providing a place for college student educators committed to a broad range of social justice issues to network; share knowledge, tools, and resources; collaborate across institutions and identities; and provide support. This Commission supports those working towards social justice and diversity issues across the wide spectrum of student affairs positions. The Commission also provides scholarship and other resources for college student educators working in multicultural and other diversity centers and offices on campus. The Commission for Social Justice Educators *compliments the functional and identity support work being done in other Commissions and Standing Committees*, while providing a unique opportunity for creating partnerships across institutions and identities.

Specific Objectives

The objectives of the Commission are as follows:

- To provide networking, resources, and support for current and future student affairs professionals committed to social justice, across a broad range of functional responsibilities.
- To encourage the formation of new ideas and practices regarding social justice in higher education by supporting and encouraging related scholarship and practice.
- To promote the importance of social justice advocacy, education, and support services within higher education, the association, and member institutions.
- To provide educational opportunities for current and emerging professionals in both personal and professional development in the areas of multicultural competency and social justice advocacy.
- To organize and disseminate information and resources to benefit ACPA membership and all students in higher education.

- To create alliances between academic and student affairs; social identity groups; and other professional associations.

CSJE seeks to support and contribute to the continued efforts regarding issues of diversity and social justice among ACPA's Standing Committees, Commissions, Core Councils, and other entities. Please let us know if there are opportunities to collaborate on issues of diversity and social justice related to student involvement by collaborating on resource development, co-sponsorship of workshops and programs, supporting scholarship, and sharing information to better individual members, the association, and the profession.

CSJE Resources of Interest
Website – Our website is still in transition but has all of the following resources and is available at http://www.myacpa.org/comm/social

Listserv - Join our listserv with 200+ active members for discussions, resources, and job postings. Sign-up on our website.

Case Study Booklet on Intersecting Identities – A series of case studies and discussion questions in complex issues of identity in student affairs practice. A great resource for student organization training or professional staff development. Available by contacting Tim Shiner at timothy.shiner@uvm.edu.

The Social Justice Resource Project - This resource, available on our website, is an annotated bibliography of the more essential resources in many areas of diversity and social justice practice and scholarship in student affairs. This resource has been narrowed from the volumes of excellent materials available based on the recommendations of respected leaders on these issues. Also available for End-Note download.

Keith E. Edwards is the graduate assistant for Beyond the Classroom Living and Learning Program at the University of Maryland. He is active in the American College Personnel Association, where he recently founded and currently serves as Chair of the Commission for Social Justice Educators. Keith can be reached at edwardsk@umd.edu.

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