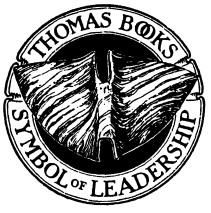
Rentz's
STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Third Edition

Rentz's STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

FIONA J. D. MacKINNON & ASSOCIATES



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PREFACE

> It should be possible to help every student to build an "educational package." Rather than saying "Let's admit good students and not get in their way," we should admit our students and then get in their way, in the most constructive sense, to help them make . . . powerful connections. (Richard Light, *Making the Most of College*, 2001).

The landscape of higher education has changed dramatically over the past 15 years. Nationally acclaimed reports have evolved from blue-ribbon panels and have challenged the status quo. As colleges and universities, learned societies, and accreditation bodies have attended to the national agenda with particular initiatives such as assessment and student learning outcomes, student affairs has also responded to the call to action. But our work is not yet complete. What should we be able to do to ensure student success?

Three particularly important paradigm shifts in recent years have realigned the nature of student affairs work: (1) the focus on student learning outcomes, (2) the systems perspective of enrollment management, and (3) the potential and power of technology. Within each functional area the paradigm shifts have reframed the central mission of student affairs work: to think about what it is that students need to know, how we can help them know and understand, and what they should be able to do with that knowledge.

The paradigm shifts provide the emerging vision of the profession in this book. Student learning has been the vital core of student affairs work since the beginning of the field; nonetheless, concentration on services, programs, and functional areas has been easier to define and to orchestrate than the vague notion of supporting students in their quest for higher learning. The current focus on student learning outcomes makes learning the responsibility of all. The enrollment management movement has captured all functional areas and banded them together as interrelated subsystems providing an organizational context for the enhancement of student learning and retention. Understanding the nature of the university as an organization with a critical societal mission, but limited resources, is part and parcel of pragmatic administration. Technology enhances our relationships with students and informs our professionalism. It expands our reach

and helps the profession respond to this new generation of students who have grown up with instant messaging, DVDs, MP3s, and multitasking.

I invite all who read this book to pause and consider the assumptions undergirding the profession and higher education. The first two chapters, thoughtfully revised from the previous edition of the book, provide the philosophical and historical tools to clarify assumptions, values, and concerns. The enrollment management chapters on admissions, financial aid, academic advising, and orientation interweave conceptually into one package loosely constructed at one institution and tightly constructed at others. Residence life, orientation, judicial affairs, career services, student activities, financial aid, and multicultural affairs provide an interesting, united focus on learning and living skills. Counseling, career services, and health services help focus on an integrated, wellness orientation to life. The final chapter of the book examines three central issues (social justice, student learning, and professionalism) that typify the current challenges facing our continually evolving profession and higher education.

I am deeply grateful to the authors for their contributions and for their expertise as this project moved forward. It has been a pleasure to work with experts who are consummate professionals and committed to the mission of the field.

I am most indebted to Audrey Rentz, who has been a mentor to me in the very best sense. Her support and guidance throughout my years at Bowling Green State University have been both personally and professionally empowering.

Fiona J.D. MacKinnon
July 2003
Bowling Green, Ohio

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Rentz's
STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1

THE PHILOSOPHICAL HERITAGE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

STAN CARPENTER

INTRODUCTION

Og and El, our Neanderthal ancestors, had a problem. To be sure, Og and El, and their tribe, had lots of problems, but this was the most vexing yet. Although they did not know it or even understand the problem, they were beginning to think too much about their children, about the tribe, and about life generally. Og and El did not understand that the issue really was that their brains and minds were becoming more complex and more differentiated. Having a good brain was an advantage and was necessary for survival. Og and El were not very big or very fast compared to other animals. They were not particularly strong or keen of sight, smell, or hearing. But they could think and plan and remember. The problem was that this ability to conceptualize caused them to wonder—to need to know, to speculate, and to be unhappy when they did not have answers. Perhaps it was something poignant, like the death of a child, or just the mundane cycle of the seasons that first elicited a search for a larger meaning to life, but whatever it was, the quest could have soon led to depression, insanity, and death for the members of the tribe and therefore the tribe itself.

Thus was philosophy invented, or as some would say *discovered*, in an attempt to supplant powerlessness with knowledge. It did not matter that the knowledge was "incorrect" (in modern terms)—simply that it explained otherwise terrifyingly uncertain and uncontrollable things such as fire and rain, birth and death. It was necessary to have something to believe in and it was important to strive to learn more.

Over time a tribal culture developed, encompassing all the beliefs, knowledge, and skills that made the group unique and contributed to their survival. The culture was instilled in the children by formal and informal means in a process of education not materially different from that of today. As the tribe became a village, then a city, then a sovereign state, philosophical knowledge grew and differentiated. Eventually, it became necessary to

attend to the higher learning of some members to prepare them to lead, to teach, and to press the search for new knowledge.

Student affairs professionals are the direct descendants of early educators, and hence heirs to a long tradition of thinking and writing about educational philosophy. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the impact of philosophy generally and several specific philosophical positions that influence higher education and the practice of student affairs work.

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

At first, all learning was philosophical. The word *philosophy* from the Greek philosophia, literally means love of wisdom or learning. Only in the past 200 years has there occurred a separation of natural philosophy (or sciences such as chemistry and physics), mental philosophy (or psychology), and moral philosophy (e.g., political science, economics, and sociology) from the general concept (Brubacher, 1982). For thousands of years, the study of philosophy was the same as advanced learning, a wide-ranging intellectual quest. The explosion of knowledge and specialization have changed that—but philosophy is still a broad and deep field.

Philosophy is a poorly understood concept. People begin sentences with "My philosophy on that is . . ." and proceed to give unsupported opinions, sometimes inconsistent with their behaviors or facts.

Philosophy can be thought of as simply a general approach to the world or it can be a process of disciplined inquiry. Gracia (1992) captured it this way:

> Philosophy may be interpreted . . . :
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> I. . . . as a set of ideas or beliefs, concerning anything, that an ordinary person may hold.
> II. . . . as a view of the world, or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive.
> III. .. . . as a discipline of learning.
> A. Activity whereby a view of the world or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive, is produced.
> B. Formulation, explanation, and justification of rules by which the production of a view of the world, or any of its parts, that seeks to be accurate, consistent, and comprehensive, is produced (philosophical methodology). (p. 56)

This chapter concerns itself primarily with the second interpretation (a view of the world), and with elements of the third (a discipline of learning.) In essence, the reader will apply the information presented (a view of the world), using the proper methods (through the discipline), to modify personal beliefs in such a way that they are accurate, consistent, and comprehensive.

THE THREE GREAT QUESTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

Originally, philosophy was concerned with virtually all knowledge, but in modern times it has come to consist of three main (very large and important) questions: What is real? How do we know? What is of value?

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the ultimate question of existence. Some people also call it metaphysics (literally "beyond physics"). Og, El, and their descendants desired to know what was real and what was ephemeral. Is the universe friendly, neutral, or malevolent? Is there order in the universe or only probabilistic chaos? Is physical existence real or is only our intellect, the goings-on in our minds, real? What is life? Is there a God or some other supernatural entity? Is this all there is?

Clearly, such questions are overwhelming and demand a systematic and satisfying answer. Just as clearly, they call for speculation, at least in the early stages of theory building and maybe for a long time after that. Every action taken by an individual, every decision, every thought will be colored by beliefs about the nature of reality.

Ontology can be usefully broken up into other areas of questions: anthropology, cosmology, theology, and teleology (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1969). Anthropology concerns the nature of the human condition. Are people innately good or evil? What is the relationship between the mind and the body? Is there a soul or spirit and does it have precedence over the worldly flesh of the body? Do humans have free will?

Cosmology involves the study of the nature and origins of the universe, including questions about time, space, perceptions, and purpose. Theology considers questions of religion. Is there a God? More than one God? A "good" God or an indifferent one? Is God all-powerful? All-knowing? Some ontological theories depend heavily on theological theories.

Teleology, or the study of purpose in the cosmos, cuts across the other areas mentioned. Is the universe a chance event or is there some larger purpose? Much of what troubled Og and El, and continues to trouble humankind, is the province of ontology. Questions of ontology, while difficult, are at least straightforward. But how can data be gathered to answer them?

Epistemology

Epistemology examines the nature of knowledge itself, sources of knowledge, and the validity of different kinds of knowledge. Generally, knowledge can be gained in the following ways: from sensory perception (empirical knowledge); from revelation (knowledge from a supernatural source or being); from an authority or by tradition; from reason, logic, or intellect; or