UNIFYING ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS:
BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN THE CURRICULUM & CO-CURRICULUM

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Purpose & Organization of this Manuscript
Drawing on research and scholarship in higher education, this manuscript will first make, an empirical case for the value of partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs. For a succinct summary of the major points made in the body of the manuscript about the value of this partnership, see appendix A (p. 9). For an iteration of specific actions strategies that student development professionals could employ to implement this partnership, see appendix B (p. 12).

The Case for Promoting Partnerships Between Academic & Student Affairs
Students’ academic success and personal development depends not only on the quality of the curriculum and classroom instruction, but also on another major division or educational unit of the college: Student Development Services (a.k.a., Student Affairs). When instructional faculty interface and collaborate with this key student-service division, combinatorial or synergistic effects are likely to be exerted on student learning and development, thereby maximizing the impact and quality of the college experience.

Student development professionals have long been aware of the fact that the success of a college’s student development program is contingent upon collaborative relations between student affairs staff and faculty (American College Personnel Association, 1975). In a seminal and highly influential text outlining future directions for the profession of student affairs, Miller & Prince (1976) categorically conclude that, “an institution’s commitment to student development is directly proportional to the number of collaborative links between the student affairs staff and the faculty” (p. 155). More recently, the Joint Task Force on Student Learning—a collaborative initiative created by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)—has been created to promote approaches to student learning that reflect connection or integration between educational experiences occurring inside and outside the classroom. As two members of the joint task force argue, “It takes a whole college to educate a whole student. Administrative leaders can rethink the conventional organization of colleges and universities to create more inventive structures and processes that integrate academic and student affairs; [and] offer professional-development opportunities for people to cooperate across institutional boundaries” (Engelkemeyer & Brown, 1998, p.12).

More specifically, there are five currently compelling reasons why academic and student affairs’ professionals need to join forces:
1. To enhance student retention (persistence to graduation)
2. To maximize student learning
3. To advance institutional assessment, accountability, and quality
4. To fulfill the overarching collegiate goals of liberal education and holistic development
5. To build campus community by bridging the historical “persistent gap” between the administrative divisions of Academic & Student Affairs.

These five relevant reasons for forging academic/student affairs partnerships will be discussed successively in the following sections of this manuscript.
1. Enhancing Student Retention (Persistence to Graduation)

National research indicates that the majority of students who withdraw from college are in good academic standing at the time of their departure (Noel, 1985; Tinto, 1993), and local (campus-specific) research indicates that non-cognitive variables better predict end-of-freshman-year academic performance than academic variables, such as SAT or ACT scores (Pickering, Calliotte, & McAuliffe, 1992; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). These findings strongly suggest that personal adjustment issues other than academic competency is at the root of most student attrition.

The powerful retention-promoting impact of student involvement in co-curricular activities and support services is highlighted by the conclusion reached by Pascarella and Terenzini, following their extensive and meticulous synthesis of over 2500 empirical studies on how college affects students:

The environmental factors that maximize persistence and educational attainment include a peer culture in which students develop close on-campus friendships, participate frequently in college-sponsored activities, and perceive their college to be highly concerned about the individual student, as well as a college emphasis on supportive services. It is worth noting that some of these environmental influences on educational attainment persist even after college size and student body selectivity are taken into account (1991, p. 604).

A summary of the work of a consortium of 12 colleges formed to implement and assess practices explicitly designed to promote student retention revealed that retention strategies developed jointly, via collaborative efforts involving academic and student affairs, resulted in more comprehensive and effective retention programs than those which had been developed previously through independent efforts by these two administrative units (Stodt & Klepper, 1987).

2. Maximizing Student Learning

In an influential Carnegie Foundation Report, based on surveys and on-site visits of college campuses across the country, Ernest Boyer noted: “As we looked at colleges it became clear that their most powerful influence is felt outside the classroom” (Marchese, 1986, p. 7). In his final report, Boyer concluded:

The undergraduate college should be held together by something more than plumbing, a common grievance over parking, or football rallies in the fall. What student do in dining halls, on the playing fields, and in the rathskeller late at night all combine to influence the outcome of higher education, and the challenge, in the building of community, is to extend the resources for learning on the campus and to see academic and nonacademic life as interlocked (1987, p.177).

Retrospective reports from alumni on what aspect(s) of the college experience were most influential in promoting their learning and development have consistently revealed that their most significant and memorable learning experiences occurred outside the classroom (Marchese,
Alumni also consistently report that participation in co-curricular activities involving student leadership had the most significant impact on the development of interpersonal and leadership skills important for their career success. These alumni self-reports have been corroborated by on-the-job managerial performance evaluations which also indicate that previous involvement in co-curricular activities, particularly those involving student leadership, is the best predictor of successful managerial performance; in fact, these experiences have been found to be more predictive of managerial success than college grades or selectivity of the college attended (American Telephone & Telegraph, 1984; Howard, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Furthermore, involvement in co-curricular leadership activity has been found to correlate positively with post-college income (Pace, 1979).

More recently, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling conducted a review of research examining the influence of out-of-class experiences on student learning and cognitive development. On the basis of this review, they reached the following conclusion:

Out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students’ academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators think. Even when students’ precollege academic learning and cognitive ability levels and other relevant characteristics are taken into account, academic and cognitive learning are positively shaped by a wide variety of out-of-class experiences. . . . Consciousness-raising would appear to be in order. Although the politics of the process will be delicate, student affairs professionals might well consider ways in which they can constructively and collaboratively bring this body of evidence to the attention of faculty members, academic administrators, and their student affairs colleagues. The research reviewed here clearly indicates that students’ out-of-class experiences—and student affairs professionals and their programs, policies, and practices—have much to contribute to students’ academic, intellectual, and cognitive development (1996, pp. 157, 160).

3. Advancing Institutional Assessment, Accountability, & Quality

Unification of the professional forces of academic and student affairs is necessary in order to ensure the quality of undergraduate education because the total effect or impact of college encompasses both curricular and co-curricular programming, and comprehensive outcomes assessment embraces both in-class and out-of-class student experiences.

Even a cursory review of college catalogues will reveal that the majority of institutional mission statements embrace educational goals that are much broader and diverse than knowledge acquisition and cognition. In fact, the goals of higher education have been found to relate more often to psychosocial, experiential, and student-development outcomes than to strictly academic or cognitive outcomes (Kuh, Shedd, & Witt, 1987; Lenning, 1988). Strong empirical support for the contention that college impact and quality must be assessed in terms of the student's total experience, both inside and outside the classroom, is provided by Pascarella and Terenzini’s comprehensive synthesis of research on how college affects students. Based on their critical review of over 2500 research studies conducted over a 20-year period, they reached the following
conclusion:

On the basis of the extensive body of evidence reviewed, one of the most inescapable and unequivocal conclusions we can make is that the impact of college is largely determined by the individual’s quality of effort and level of involvement in both academic and nonacademic activities. Such a conclusion suggests that the impact of college is a result of the extent to which an individual student exploits the people, programs, facilities, opportunities, and experiences that the college makes available (1991, pp. 610-611)(italics added).

4. Fulfilling the Overarching Collegiate Goals of Liberal Education & Holistic Development

Historically, general education has been viewed almost exclusively as a content or curricular issue. However, reviews of the stated goals of liberal education (historically, the focus of academic affairs) and holistic development (historically, the focus of student affairs) find them to be strikingly similar (Grandy, 1988; Kuh, Shed, & Whitt, 1987). As Berg notes, “To educate liberally, learning experiences must be offered which facilitate the maturity of the whole person and enhance development of intellectual maturity. These are the goals of student development and clearly they are consistent with the mission and goals of liberal education” (1983, p. 12).

The need to consider general education as a student development process is underscored by the results of a comprehensive, longitudinal study of students at 159 4-year colleges conducted by Astin (1991). He found that the form and content of the general education curriculum had no significant impact on a wide range of student outcomes related to general education; what did have the most significant impact on students’ achievement and development were interpersonal process variables: the frequency and quality of student-student and faculty-student interaction.

More recently, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling reported that,

A growing body of research suggests not only that students develop holistically (i.e., change in one area of a student's growth is accompanied by changes in other aspects of that student's being) but also that the sources of influence on student development are themselves holistic. Change along any given dimension appears to be shaped by multiple and often diverse experiences or conditions (1996, p. 149).

5. Building Campus Community by Bridging the Historical “Persistent Gap” between the Administrative Divisions of Academic & Student Affairs

Over 20 years ago, Miller and Prince made what has turned out to be a prophetic statement in their influential book, The Future of Student Affairs: “To some extent, institutional programs have been dividing the student into parts and competing for control” (1976, p. 155). This same observation was also made and discussed extensively in four other influential books on American higher education: Ernest Boyer’s College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (1987), the Carnegie Foundations’ Campus Life: In Search of Community (1990), Margaret Barr & Lee Upcraft’s New Futures for Student Affairs (1990), and Involving Colleges by George Kuh et al. (1991). In 1988, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators devoted a special
edition of its professional periodical (NASPA Journal, vol. 20, no. 1) entirely to the issue of the “persistent gap” between student life and academic life in higher education. More recently, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) published a blue-ribbon report, titled The Student Learning Imperative, which included the following statement as one of its major tenets:

Student affairs professionals [should] attempt to make “seamless” what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected experiences by bridging organizational boundaries and forging collaborative partnerships with the faculty and others to enhance student learning (1994, p. 3).

The recurrent theme in these scholarly works is that there is a schism between the curriculum and co-curriculum, marked by compartmentalization of professional responsibilities and divisive political territoriality, which has resulted in a splintering of holistic student development and liberal education into disjointed parts. These fragmented components need to be reassembled if collegiate institutions intend to promote productive partnerships and build campus community. Students also need to experience integration of the curriculum and co-curriculum in order to maximize their development in college, and Academic and Student Affairs need each other to realize their respective educational objectives. Student Affairs needs support from the academic sector to ensure that its programs are delivered intrusively, systemically, and perennially; while Academic Affairs needs support from the Student Life sector to enhance the relevance of classroom learning and to realize the full range its stated goals for liberal education.
References


Appendix A
WHY ACADEMIC & STUDENT AFFAIRS NEED EACH OTHER

◆ WHY ACADEMIC AFFAIRS NEEDS STUDENT AFFAIRS TO REALIZE ITS EDUCATIONAL GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. To Complement & Enrich “Academic” Learning with Experiential Learning—i.e., to complete the learning cycle by converting:
   a) vicarious learning → to personally experienced learning
   b) abstract thinking → to concrete (situation-centered) thinking
   c) deductive reasoning → to inductive reasoning
   d) theory → practice
   e) knowledge → to action
   f) conviction → to commitment.

2. To Help Faculty Better Understand & Relate to the Learner—i.e., Today’s College Students.

3. To Increase Faculty Awareness of Student Development Theory & Practice.

4. To Harness & Promote Positive Peer Influence on Student Development.

5. To Complement the Traditional Academic Curriculum with Flexible Education Programming—which can be immediately responsive to contemporary issues and emerging student needs.

◆ WHY STUDENT AFFAIRS NEEDS ACADEMIC AFFAIRS TO REALIZE ITS EDUCATIONAL GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. To Increase Students’ Breadth and Frequency of Involvement in Co-Curricular Programs—e.g., via in-class announcements/encouragement; via extra-credit/required course assignments.

2. To Ensure Students’ Depth of Involvement in Student Development Programming—i.e., To Have Students Think Deeply About, and "Internalize" Co-Curricular Experiences—e.g., via meaningful course assignments that require students to actively reflect on situation-specific personal learning experiences [via writing and focused discussion] and integrate or “connect” them with cross-situational concepts and principles learned in the classroom.

3. To Gain Access to the Student Body and Deliver Student-Development Programs “Intrusively” (e.g., student development programs offered as components of required courses).

4. To Ensure That Co-Curricular Programs are “Tied Into” an Established, Stable “Structure”
Appendix B

CREATING ALLIANCES WITH ACADEMICAFFAIRS:
SPECIFIC ACTION STRATEGIES FOR
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

1. HUMAN RELATIONS & NETWORKING: Winning Friends and Influencing People

* Build good will and future alliances by doing small favors for faculty (e.g., passing along an article which may be of interest to a particular faculty member; collecting and sharing data with faculty—such as first-year student survey data or the results of student-satisfaction surveys).

* Invite a faculty member, or a small group of faculty, to lunch. (Note: If this could be done on a regular basis throughout the academic year, it may be possible to arrange for every faculty member to receive a personal invitation before the year is over.)

* Invite a faculty member to join you at a conference on student development or the first-year experience.

* If possible, attend faculty-sponsored events (e.g., faculty development workshops, faculty lectures, or faculty forums) for the purpose of learning more about academic issues and to show support for the academic program—which, in turn, should increase the likelihood that faculty will reciprocate and support student development programs.

* Become familiar with the professional and scholarly interests of individual faculty members so that they may be selectively asked to contribute their expertise to collaborative projects (e.g., research studies; grant proposals). For instance, an anthropologist or sociologist might be interested in doing an observational or naturalistic study of student behavior on campus—which could also be of great interest to Student Affairs (such as race relations on campus).

* Become familiar with faculty members’ avocational interests so that they may be selectively targeted and recruited for co-curricular partnerships that may be especially interesting or appealing to them (e.g., a bicycling professor may be interested in sponsoring a student cycling club).

* Recognize or reward faculty for their contributions to student life (e.g., by sending them a personal thank-you note; by presenting a “student service award” to a faculty member at graduation, convocation, or on “awards night”).

* Enlist the support of influential members of the academic community (e.g., academic vice-
president; director of faculty development; president of faculty senate; divisional deans or department chairs)—to serve as allies, advocates, and/or persuasive agents for making incremental changes in faculty “culture” on campus—tilting it in a direction that is more student-centered and open to collaboration with student life professionals.

* Extend a *personal welcome* and arrange for a *personal visit* with *new faculty*. First impressions are very powerful and may set the tone for future interactions.
   
   Note: The number of faculty retirees is expected to increase sharply during the next decade, so new-faculty hiring may be reaching an all-time high at many institutions. This may represent an unprecedented opportunity to proactively alter faculty culture—via new-faculty recruitment/selection and new-faculty orientation—perhaps transforming the culture into one that is appreciably more student-centered and collaborative.

2. **RAISING FACULTY CONSCIOUSNESS/AWARENESS OF THE FACT THAT STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS ARE EDUCATORS**

* **Invite faculty to make presentations on your “turf”** (e.g., invite them to present their research at your staff meetings).

* **Make presentations to faculty on their “turf”** (e.g., during a faculty-senate meeting or new-faculty orientation) to apprise them of how the goals/objectives of the student development program are very *compatible or congruent* with those of the academic program and the college mission (e.g., liberal education and holistic development), and suggest how collaboration between faculty and student development professionals would be mutually reinforcing and rewarding.

* **Offer workshops for faculty** under the auspices of the college’s *faculty development program* (e.g., workshops on the social and emotional development of college students, or on the attitudes, values, and interests of today’s first-year students).

* **Write articles** for on-campus publications that are *read by faculty* (e.g., faculty newsletter), or publish and disseminate a *student development newsletter* containing information on student affairs’ work intentionally designed to educate or interest the faculty, and to demonstrate how student development work advances the educational mission of the college.

* When describing co-curricular events in person or in print, make a conscious effort to *clearly articulate the educational purpose, objective, or outcome* of the event.

* Be conscious of the *“non-academic” connotations* associated with *language* used to describe student development programming. For instance: student “activities” (may connote fun ‘n’ games); “extracurricular” (may connote a peripheral frill or side show which is far removed from
the institution’s main event or central purpose); student “affairs” or student “personnel” (both of which may connote an administrative/managerial focus—rather than an educational one); student “services” (which may connote a custodial or customer-service function—rather than an educational one).

* Construct a student development curriculum—i.e., a co-curriculum with procedures, structures, and written products that directly parallel those found in the academic program. For example:

  - Co-curricular catalogue (paralleling the traditional course catalogue), which would contain: (a) a mission statement for the student development program, (b) educational goals and objectives, (c) programs and activities, (d) names and educational background of student development professionals. (Perhaps this co-curricular catalogue could be incorporated within the traditional college catalogue—as a special, clearly identifiable subsection.)

  - Co-curricular schedule of events (paralleling the traditional schedule of classes issued each semester), which would contain the titles, dates, times, and brief descriptions of co-curricular events to be offered during the semester. This co-curricular events schedule might be attached to, or included as a separate section within the traditional schedule of classes.

  - Co-curricular event syllabus (paralleling the traditional course syllabus), which provides information on the event’s objectives, content, and process of instructional delivery.

  - Co-curricular student assessment—for example, ask students after they have experienced a particular co-curricular program or event if that experience contributed to their learning or development, particularly with respect to the intended educational objective(s) for that event.

  - Co-curricular transcript (paralleling the traditional registrar-issued transcript of completed courses) which formally lists and documents students’ co-curricular achievements—both for personal recognition and for future student use when applying to graduate schools and career positions.

3. FORGING INTENTIONAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS’ CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

* Learn as much as possible about the academic curriculum so that you may find courses or assignments that may connect with existing or to-be-planned co-curricular events. (Note: Individual student development professionals might be assigned to specific academic departments to serve as liaisons or connection agents between that department and the co-curriculum.)

* Equip faculty with linking modules or model assignments that they might conveniently use as
in-class exercises or out-of-class course assignments in conjunction with co-curricular events. Note: These linking modules and assignments could be included as part of a very practical, ready-to-use faculty source book or faculty resource guide—constructed by student development professionals for the purpose of equipping/empowering faculty with information and strategies for making meaningful connections with the co-curriculum.

* Teach courses dealing with student development issues—in the classroom for academic credit. For instance: new-student seminar; senior seminar; interdisciplinary courses with an experiential component (e.g., leadership development).

4. ADMINISTRATIVE & ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES

* Capitalize on naturally occurring or already existing “intersection points” (i.e., educational or administrative areas/functions where academic and student affairs overlap) to initiate dialogue and stimulate partnerships.
  For example:
  a) new-student orientation
  b) new-student seminar (“extended” first-year orientation course)
  c) academic advising (intersecting with career counseling and personal counseling)
  d) practicums, internships, volunteer (service-learning) experiences
  e) residential life-based academic programming (e.g., “living-learning” experiences such as tutoring or academic advising conducted in student residences)
  f) student leadership development
  g) senior-year experience programming (e.g., collaboration with respect to preparation for career entry and the transition to post-college life).

* Create structural, issue-centered opportunities for cooperative interaction between Academic and Student Affairs professionals by initiating task forces, ad hoc committees, or joint research projects to address topics of interest and concern to both parties (e.g., student retention). This serves to bring together members of these two professional groups who might otherwise never work together (or even interact with each other) to work interdependently toward a common goal.

* Organize a discussion group or “critical-moment learning team” of faculty and student affairs professionals after a high-impact event or critical incident has taken place on campus (e.g., racial incident or student suicide).

* Arrange for temporary exchanges of Academic & Student Affairs professionals (e.g., via release time, load reduction, temporary leaves, or “internal sabbaticals”) for those professionals who would like a change of routine and who would be willing to “cross over” to another division of the college and embrace a different educational task or challenge.
* Consider creating and making *joint appointments* to positions that bridge Academic & Student Affairs responsibilities (e.g., Coordinator or Director of the First-Year Experience).
* When making *office assignments*, consider placing a faculty member and a Student Affairs professional *within the same geographical area*—for purposes of promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and potential collaboration.

* Provide *incentives* for campus initiatives that involve *collaboration* between faculty and student affairs professionals (e.g., mini-grants, travel funds, campus space).