HOW CAMPUS ACTIVITIES CAN LEAD THE MODERN UNIVERSITY: FIVE IMPERATIVES

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THE POINT THAT HIGHER EDUCATION IS UNDERGOING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE is made so frequently that it has almost become a cliché. But like many platitudes, the frequency with which it is repeated is a testament to its broad acceptance and central importance in the field of higher education. A glance at the history of this profession reveals the often seismic shifts that have at once shaken our foundations and subsequently revolutionized how we teach, support and develop our students. In short, higher education is in constant flux, and while this change may seem to be occurring at higher rates of speed, change has always been a part of higher education, and professionals have always needed to adapt to keep up.

So in what ways is higher education currently changing? Perhaps no other change is more noticeable than the dramatic increase in the cost of attending college – and the extent to which the burden for paying for college has been shifted to the students. Addressed less often is the extent to which this change shapes students' expectations of college.

Depending on the age of the individual reading this piece, one's experiences in college may have been quite different. More seasoned readers likely went to college in a time in which higher education was seen as a public good. The state and federal government highly subsidized the costs of pursuing a degree based on the philosophy that an educated person was an asset to a democratic society.

Younger readers are more likely to have gone to school during a time in which higher education has been broadly seen as a consumer good. If someone wants to secure a good future and enhance their social mobility, they might decide to invest in a college degree. If they are successful in completing a college degree, this approach remains effective in improving one's life, despite the high cost (Torpey, 2018).

How do students pay for the increasing cost of higher education? One way is that the vast majority are working more than previous generations. In his message to members in the NASPA Leadership Exchange magazine, NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education President Kevin Kruger notes that "40 percent of full-time students and almost 80 percent of part-time students work while attending college" (Kruger, 2018, p. 4). This fact alone dramatically changes the college experience for many. It deprives these individuals of time for study and likely inhibits their participation in co-curricular experiences. From a practical standpoint, the more hours a student works, the less time they have for involvement on campus.

As costs have risen, colleges and universities have also faced more stiff competition from each other to attract students. Projections indicate that the number of high school graduates should begin in the next decade to flatten and then steadily decline (Selingo, 2018). Such changes have required a change in approach for how colleges and universities market themselves that some would argue exacerbates the commodification of higher education. This shift might be best described as moving from selling education as *transformative* to selling it as *transactional*. In this context, it may appear as though the purpose of college is simply to complete a degree, rather than to develop, grow and learn. Participating in experiences outside of the classroom may feel likewise superfluous since it is not required to complete the degree.

It is imperative that campus activities professionals not only avoid the trap of the transactional approach to higher education but fully embrace the transformative possibilities of this work. For example, it would be limiting to view the role of campus activities as simply providing engaging events for the campus. To the end that such a view implies a lack of substance, the result could be fewer resources allocated by campus leaders who may see students' "entertainment" as a luxury in a time of scarcity (Cummings and Peck, 2017, p. 149-150). But if campus activities professionals embrace the potential of transformative education, the field can positively contribute and provide leadership for the field in the uncertain times ahead. This article offers guidance on how this can be accomplished.

STUDENTS ARE CHANGING

As we peer into the future, it is imperative that the modern college and university continue to focus on the needs of students. Such focus requires an understanding of the changing needs, perceptions, and desires of a new generation of students. For example, colleges and universities will have to move beyond the "Millennial generation." Two younger generations follow Millennials: Generation Z (students born from 1995 through the beginning of the present decade) and Generation Alpha. While the Alphas will not hit college campuses for another decade, Generation Z is the group that colleges and universities serve today (Seemiller and Grace, 2016). According to Seemiller and Grace (2017), this generation "… has been profoundly shaped by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, a volatile economy, and social justice movements. While these issues also have affected those in other generations, the historical context of these individuals is much deeper than those in Generation Z, who may have never known anything different" (p. 22).

What's more, Selingo (2018) notes that "The cohort that arrives on campus in the 2020s will be more racially and ethnically diverse, and will include more first-generation and low-income students than any other group of undergraduates previously served by American higher education" (para 1). Campus activities is in a propitious position to impact the ability of colleges and universities to meet the needs of a changing demographic of students. To accomplish this, campus activities professionals must adapt. In the sections that follow, we lay out five imperatives that can guide practitioners as they approach this work.

IMPERATIVE 1: LEVERAGE THE POWER OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In the past, professionals in the field of campus activities may have wished for a generally accepted, well-defined, and standardized description of their work across all colleges and universities. It can be tempting to think that because campus activities includes such a wide variety of programs for student engagement, it may appear less professional than some more well-defined units and departments. However, its historic expansiveness and porous boundaries make campus activities in the modern college and university the perfect umbrella under which all student engagement could be located.

There is a growing body of research that substantiates the importance of student engagement, often in surprising ways. One example lies in the work of Gallup, whose efforts to define and measure well-being illustrate that engagement matters not only in college but can make an impact across one's lifespan as well. In *Great Jobs*

Great Lives, Gallup reported that 29% of Americans say that they are not thriving in any of the five elements considered in the research (purpose wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial wellbeing, community wellbeing, and physical wellbeing). College graduates are considerably less likely to be in the same predicament. Only about 17% say they are not thriving in any of the elements – and more than 10% say they are thriving in all five elements (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2014).

Gallup's research confirms the impact a college degree makes on one's wellbeing. But what was even more compelling (and relevant for campus activities professionals) was what the research concluded about the impact of engagement:

> *…where graduates went to college … hardly matters at all to their current well-being and their work lives in comparison to their experiences in college. …. Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates (Gallup-Purdue Index, 2014, p. 4).*

If a graduate was emotionally attached to the institution, their odds of thriving in all areas of wellbeing were two times higher, and even higher if the graduate felt that institution had prepared them well for life beyond college. Seeing one's work in campus activities in these terms elevates our role from simply providing opportunities for fun and entertainment to carefully cultivating an environment in which students feel challenged, supported and cared for. Campus activities professionals are uniquely prepared for leading this endeavor.

Considering the engagement needs of modern students, campus activities has many advantages. Generation Z prefers to learn independently, involving others "only when they must" (Seemiller and Grace, 2016, p. 23). While the focus and self-determination inherent in this approach have many positive attributes, it is in stark contrast to the kinds of skills and attributes employers are often looking for in recent college graduates such as teamwork, collaboration, and leadership (Career Readiness Defined, n.d.). By contrast to the dreaded group project, co-curricular learning opportunities that are abundant in campus activities offer a fun and compelling version of the group project. Consider a campus programming board that plans complex events and initiatives. This kind of experience essentially demands that students work together and that they work closely with their advisor as well.

In the report *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter,* Kuh (2008) shows how students who participate in these kinds of high-impact practices out-perform their peers who do not. These practices "typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks," and place "students in circumstances that essentially demand they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters" (Kuh, 2008, p. 14).

One way that campus activities can lead the modern university is to leverage the power of student engagement. Practitioners would be advised to be mindful of the impact that this connection can make on students' learning from co-curricular experiences and the impact that it can make on their wellbeing throughout their life. We also must help others outside of our profession to understand this impact so our work will not be so easy to dismiss as extraneous to the process of higher education.

Engaging Students: The Potential Gamification of Higher Education

by Gwendolyn Dungy

It was more than a decade ago that I struck up a conversation at an airport with an interesting young man while we waited for our respective flights. What made him interesting to me was the way he was dressed. His fancy boots alone could have made him stand out from everyone else. He was wearing all black, topped off with a black silver-studded leather jacket. A heavy silver chain hung in a loop from his jean pocket down to his boot. He also looked as if he had not slept for a while. *(continued)*

Intruding on his privacy, I asked this young man where he was headed. He said he was going to Los Angeles to participate in a gaming conference. At this point, I knew that there was some interest in gaming, but a conference! I was curious and asked him to tell me about it. With more than a little enthusiasm, he told me that thousands of people would be attending, and he would be offering a session on game development. He added, with what I thought was a touch of pride, that he had something of a reputation as a game developer.

Out of courtesy, I suspect, he inquired about my work. When he learned that I was involved with colleges and universities, he began to chuckle and said, "No offense, but you all have no idea about how to motivate people to learn." He said that he liked to learn but did not have the patience to do so the way colleges and universities taught.

He gave me an example of how gamers he knew could never sit through a 60-minute lecture but could stay up for 30 hours playing a video game. He had my complete attention as he went on to say, "You all don't know how to incentivize people to keep trying in order to get the reward and then be motivated to keep trying to move to the next level." He noted how small the reward might be in a game he might develop such as the image of a balloon released at just the right time when a gamer was at a decision point of continuing the game or quitting. I wanted to hear more, but there was no time.

Nevertheless, this brief airport conversation was insightful and enlightening to me. I felt as if I had discovered something that I needed to share with student affairs professionals and faculty. My very next speech to senior student affairs administrators was about the coming revolution of gaming and how its influence on our students would have a profound impact on colleges and universities.

I told the senior administrators that most of our students in the future would be gamers and that faculty and student affairs staff would need to observe and learn what was important to them to more effectively help them to achieve learning outcomes inside and outside of the classroom. I shared demographics on gamers and stressed the generation gap between educators and learners.

I urged the senior administrators to begin to work with their staff to understand the learning styles and some of the common characteristics of gamers, many of which might appear incongruent with the ideals of higher education. For example, according to Beck and Wade (2004), gamers want to be entertained and treated as customers. I wanted the administrators to realize that our job was to imagine a future of higher education when the majority of our students would be gamers with particular expectations that colleges and universities would have to meet. Toyama (2015), for example, examined a potential future in which postsecondary institutions invested in gamifying their courses and experiences.

"Students as gamers" is no longer a new phenomenon. However, the same imperatives of knowing who our students are and what motivates them must be priorities in working with our newest generation of students. Engagement programs that explicitly provide opportunities for leadership education and development and are unified for collaboration under the umbrella of Campus Activities is a prudent and sound direction to pursue in meeting the expectations of new students in the modern university.

IMPERATIVE 2: TARGET INSTITUTIONWIDE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As we continue to explore an enhanced role for campus activities in the modern university, it will be necessary to think about how this work advances important goals of the institution. Engagement is an important outcome of work in campus activities, but it should not be pursued singularly. Campus activities can impact the pursuit of many important institutional outcomes.

A traditional view of the postsecondary student experience is that learning takes place in the classroom, while experiences outside of the classroom exist largely to promote a lively campus environment. As Benjamin and Hamrick (2011) wrote, "Beliefs associating student learning with particular times and classroom spaces are persistent and long-standing" (p. 23). Blake-Jones (2011) attributes this to the belief that "…student affairs educators are not always sure of our purpose or we fail to convincingly represent our role as educators to others" (p. 36).

Light (2001) conducted a study of Harvard students, asking them about the most influential learning experiences during their college years, writing:

> *I assumed the most important and memorable academic learning goes on inside the classroom, while outside activities provide a useful but modest supplement. The evidence shows the opposite is true … When we asked students to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside the classroom (p. 8).*

How would the approach of campus activities professionals be different if all of them focused on outcomes beyond just attending to student satisfaction or the learning and development outcomes of the students who plan these events? Could we demonstrate the impact on students' wellbeing that comes from joining a student organization, making sustaining friendships that provide support throughout the college years? What about the important outcome of diversity and intercultural fluency? Could we show that students who get involved in co-curricular experiences are more likely to meaningfully connect with others from different backgrounds and perspectives?

The future of higher education will likely have fewer boundaries. One's work will be less confined by a particular office, program or functional area. The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education, traditionally known for helping higher education professionals assess their effectiveness in a variety of functional areas is recognizing the need to shift the perspective from the efficacy of individual areas to a more holistic approach. The forthcoming 10th edition of the CAS Standards will include two new cross-functional frameworks. According to CAS President Gavin Henning, these frameworks will consider, "… issues that span multiple offices such as first-year experiences and high-risk behaviors" (para. 4).

In the Fall 2017 edition of NASPA Leadership Exchange, Pam Watts, Executive Director of the National Intramural and Recreational Sports Association: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation (NIRSA) addressed the need for colleges and universities to go "upstream" in order to address the critical issue of wellness on campus (p. 11). Campus activities must take a similar approach to issues such as student success – including the persistence of at-risk students. There also is a potential to impact students' ability to work in teams, their critical thinking and reasoning skills and a host of other skills and abilities. In addition to being a desired outcome from a college education, these skills are highly desirable by employers.

IMPERATIVE 3: HELP STUDENTS GAIN PRACTICAL SKILLS

According to Seemiller and Grace (2017), Generation Z is hardwired to seek real-world learning experiences. They are selective about how they spend their limited time, questioning whether a particular course or activity will prepare them for an increasingly competitive world (Seemiller and Grace, 2016, p. 37).

Ultimately, the goal of engagement programs is to provide learners the opportunity to acquire the skills they need when they enter the world of work and when they carry out their responsibilities as ethical and socially responsible leaders.

While there are many experiences in which students can gain employability skills, campus activities can be particularly fertile ground. For more than six decades, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has collected employers' perspectives on the skills necessary for success in the workplace (Mackes, 2017). Mackes (2017) reports that "certain skills and attributes have consistently appeared on the list, reinforcing the fact that these are not short-lived trends" (p. 5). In the recent report, *Career Readiness Defined,* NACE

lists eight skills desired by employers: critical thinking/problem solving; oral and written communications; teamwork/collaboration; digital technology; leadership; professionalism/work ethic; career management; and global intercultural fluency.

It is easy to imagine how students can gain these skills through participation in a wide variety of co-curricular experiences. In the book, *Engagement and Employability: Integrating Career Learning Through Cocurricular Experiences in Postsecondary Education,* authors representing six professional associations in student affairs and nine distinct cocurricular experiences discuss how these experiences can promote the development of employability skills (Peck, 2017). Findings from Project CEO (Cocurricular Experience Outcomes) reported in the book also bolster the assertion that this learning is both naturally occurring and can be cultivated (Griffin, Peck and LaCount, 2017).

Perhaps the most exciting possibility that stems from focusing learning outcomes in co-curricular experiences toward employability skills is the ability to accomplish a long-desired goal of higher education that has remained out of our grasp – the hope for a truly integrative learning environment.

Our collective inability to overcome this limitation is based upon focusing on technical skills (hard skills) rather than transferable skills (soft skills). Data from Project CEO show that students gain both technical skills (hard skills) and transferable skills (soft skills) from their classes. When campus activities professionals align their learning outcomes to these skills, it brings classroom and co-curricular learning together. While the nearly infinite variety of possible technical skills makes it impossible to apply all of them in a co-curricular context, focusing on transferable skills ensures that the skills students gain will complement their academic learning and their experiences inside and outside of the classroom will connect like never before.

Skills desired by employers such as teamwork, critical thinking or leadership cannot be learned without a context in which to apply them. Campus activities provides that context, serving as yet another way that this profession can provide leadership within the modern university. In particular, leadership education will be increasingly important.

IMPERATIVE 4: FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

While many academic programs exist that focus on leadership, a significant advantage of programs in campus activities is that they offer the opportunity to learn leadership while practicing it. For this reason, campus activities professionals can play a significant role in the modern university through an intentional focus on improving leadership development on campus.

Data from the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership revealed that on many campuses, leadership development is in need of improvement (Owen, 2012). While there are many ways that institutions could accomplish this, it makes sense to align leadership education with employability skills. As Kruger and Peck (2017) write, "The alignment between these skills and the kinds of learning outcomes already pursued in student affairs is clear. The data are compelling and suggest that a myriad of experiences are embedded in co-curricular learning that can help develop [these] skills" (p. xii-xiv).

A new approach to developing employability skills in leadership development programs can be found in the Cocurricular Career Connections (C3) Leadership Model (Peck and Preston, 2018). The C3 model offers a structure for integrating a variety of experiences on and off campus, including 1) connecting cocurricular learning to classroom learning, 2) connecting experiential learning to learning in structured leadership development programs, and 3) connecting learning in college to learning throughout one's career. The C3 model demonstrates how leadership educators can design programs that draw students into deeper participation in co-curricular experiences. The model also creates a meaningful connection between leadership development experiences in college and professional development throughout one's career.

Leadership development is not well understood, even by many who endeavor to promote student leadership through co-curricular experiences. Campus activities professionals can do much to contribute to the modern university by enhancing their ability to develop student leaders through participation in co-curricular experiences they advise.

IMPERATIVE 5: REIMAGINE ASSESSMENT WITH STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Without a doubt, assessment and accountability will continue to be priorities for administrators in supporting the claims of the institution in contributing to the success of students. To make a case for providing opportunities for every student to acquire leadership skills, administrators need evidence that outcomes from engagement programs do indeed contribute to student success as defined broadly by the institution and as specifically expected by students and families.

Students must be at the center of everything that we do. In the realm of assessment, this means that we cannot treat student learning as if it is a small part of assessment. We must remember that assessment is but a small part of student learning. In practical terms, this means we must plan for more than just assessing student learning, we must methodically and intentionally think about how this learning can be derived from students experiences. Many programs write lists of student learning outcomes they are measuring, but how many make a detailed plan for how this learning will take place?

Finally, campus activities professionals must share the data collected about students to help them develop and grow. It is important to create assessment strategies that help students benchmark their learning against their peers and their past selves as they develop and grow.

CONCLUSION

Eric Hoffer (1982) wrote, "In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (p. 30). Campus activities should heed this warning. As costs continue to rise, and competition increases, it is unlikely that anecdotal evidence of student learning will suffice to secure resources for our programs. Campus activities professionals must embrace our role as educators and prepare ourselves to speak this truth loudly and repeatedly to our stakeholders. We must show how student engagement benefits students and advances the goals and objectives of the institution. We must show internal and external stakeholders how student leadership benefits students during college and prepares them for successful careers. We mt also be prepared to prove everything we say through assessment. If we remember to keep students at the center of this assessment, we will better empower our students and graduates to tell our story as well.

The imperatives outlined here are significant, and for many may require a substantial change in approach. But if, as a profession, campus activities is able to make progress in this direction, we should be prepared to not only survive in the modern university, but to lead within it.

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