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Campus community: Linking student affairs and the professoriate

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Abstract

The term community has many definitions and is used to describe a broad range of groups, events, and relationships that exist in different forms, at different degrees of development and maturity, and with differing values and expectations. It is used to describe towns and neighborhoods, groups, and relationships. Most college campuses view the larger community as a group of smaller communities such as, fraternities and sororities, cultural and ethnic populations, sporting events, and gatherings for special celebrations. Some higher education communities exist at a very superficial level and some have great depth and commitment. Some make new members work to gain acceptance, and some ask nothing more than money from their members. Some exist for a common cause and some for protection from a common enemy.

Campus Community: Linking Student Affairs and the Professoriate

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The term community has many definitions and is used to describe a broad range of groups, events, and relationships that exist in different forms, at different degrees of development and maturity, and with differing values and expectations. It is used to describe towns and neighborhoods, groups, and relationships. Most college campuses view the larger community as a group of smaller communities such as, fraternities and sororities, cultural and ethnic populations, sporting events, and gatherings for special celebrations.

Some higher education communities exist at a very superficial level and some have great depth and commitment. Some make new members work to gain acceptance, and some ask nothing more than money from their members. Some exist for a common cause and some for protection from a common enemy.

When speaking about community in academe, usual references are toward a broad vision for campus life that allows students to learn, grow, and develop to their best potential in a challenging yet safe environment (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Enhancing campus life, however, cannot be equated with building community. Community needs to be more than just creating a challenging but safe environment where students can grow, learn, and develop to their best potential. It needs to be more than just saying we should have "involving colleges" or that the community should be characterized by being purposeful, just, open, caring, disciplined, and

celebrative (Strohm-Kitchener, 1985). It needs to be defined in a way that challenges us and pulls us toward a better future. In essence, these conditions should be viewed as the building blocks for structuring future academic communities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of community in colleges and universities, applying it primarily in the college student union environment. Specifically, I will review the characteristics of an enriched college community, specify the common ties and social interactions of a community which creates bonds among its members, and describe common ground between the professoriate and student affairs professionals. Throughout this work, I will examine the role of student unions in creating community.

Characteristics of a College Community

Community: Everyone wants it--no one knows how to obtain it. The concept defies easy definition. Ultimately, the question becomes "How do we build community?" College union and activities professionals are charged with the task of building communities among people with differences (ACU-I Bulletin, 1991), while helping them transcend their own cultures and experiences in order to understand, respect, and celebrate the culture and experiences of others.

Many similar characteristics of community are cited throughout recent literature (Peck, 1991; Carnegie Report, 1990). M. Scott Peck (1991) describes in great depth the nature, process, and patterns of

community building. Offering a definition which focuses more on a process or journey than a product or destination, Scott offers the following definition:

> *Community begins with good communication, where we speak and listen to each other openly and honestly. It requires both courage and patience as we learn to confront, understand, and accept differences in cultures and experiences. It calls for objectivity because it constantly challenges our traditions, attitudes, lifestyles, behavior, preconceived notions, and expectations. It is exciting and rewarding as the barriers of misunderstanding are dropped and acceptance changes to respect, and ultimately to a celebration of cultures and differences.* (p. 14)

This definition echoes closely the recent call for a community of scholars based on common purposes and shared experiences. Higher education communities traditionally were formed for the purpose of exchanging knowledge and the betterment of society. Today, there exists a factor of personal enrichment garnered from participation in these communities.

Ernest Boyer (1987), in his study of undergraduate life, found that the absence of community was acute on college campuses:

> We found a greater separation, sometimes to the point of isolation, between academic and social life on campus. Colleges like to speak of the campus as community, and yet what is being learned in most residence halls today has little connection to the classrooms, indeed it may undermine the educational purposes of the college. (p. 5)

Boyer weaves the theme of community as he examines the nature of out of class experiences and their relationship to higher learning. He describes the kinds of communities needed on college campuses when he states: "What we need today are groups of well-informed, caring individuals who band together in the spirit of community to learn from one another, to participate, as citizens, in the democratic process" (1987, p. 280).

The importance of the higher education community in developing the individual should not be taken for granted. It is participation in these communities that enables students to become independent and self-reliant human beings. Out-of-class experiences and their relationship to higher learning are the basis for current higher education communities (Boyer, 1987).

Student affairs professionals pursue this goal in providing for the holistic development of students. The call to community is readily apparent in the student affairs profession's assumptions and beliefs about itself. On the 50th anniversary of The Student Personnel Point of View, an historical document produced by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators issued a strong statement about community:

> Healthy communities are settings where students learn to work together, make and keep friends, care about the welfare of others, balance freedom and responsibility, and appreciate human differences. Communities are of high quality when they encourage friendships, intimacy, and intelligent risk taking, and

> allow values to be freely shared and examined (NASPA, 1987, p. 12).

In a perfect world, there is equal value placed upon classroom and out-of-class experience. In this nirvana, the student would develop each realm simultaneously and receive support from two factions: the professoriate and student affairs professionals. Unfortunately, college union and activities professionals and the professoriate have become so distant from each another that their lack of a collective response signals that the principles of community--no matter how desirous--have not yet been approached, much less realized, on our campuses.

Recent publications have amplified this call to community. At the start of this decade, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching followed its major work of the '80's, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America, with, Campus Life: In Search of Community (Carnegie Foundation, 1990). This special report called for campuses to return to certain principles in the form of a social contract. Among the principles appropriate for campuses to hold were the following:

> First, a college or university is an educationally purposeful community, a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.

> Second, a college or university is an open community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.
>
> Third, a college or university is a just community, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued.
>
> Fourth, a college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.
>
> Fifth, a college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.
>
> Sixth, a college or university is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared. (Carnegie Foundation, 1990, pp. 7-8)

The Carnegie reports provide a common literature for the college union and activities professionals and the professoriate to answer the call to community--a call to a more encompassing definition of scholarship, demonstrated within a more principled community. Blake (1979) suggests that community evolves by co-curricular learning. Societal change is only brought forth by the "intensification of the process of learning by experience." Intellectual growth is seen to be equal to personal development, and therefore, is worthy of scrutinization in the eyes of the professoriate and student affairs professionals.

Does this mean that the college union and activities professionals and professoriate are so distant in their approaches that a common ground cannot be achieved? On the contrary, retention strategies, comprehensive orientation programs, and outcome assessment efforts are joint ventures for academic and student affairs on a number of campuses (Stodt, 1987). Further evidence of these joint ventures appear in the 1990 and 1991 Association of College Unions--International (ACU-I) annual conference programs: a session called "Orientation as an Educational Experience" presented by Charles Rausch from the University of Minnesota (1990) and another called "Developing Successful Faculty Linkages" presented by Buddy Couvion from Central Missouri State University (1991) demonstrate such collaboration.

The classroom's focus on the individual and the campus's priority for the group complement each other, making both essential ingredients of a community of scholars. Such collaboration is not only possible, but productive. In addition, the ACU-I Think Tank reports of 1991 underlined the importance of faculty participation in establishing the educational role of the college union ("The Time Is Right," 1991; "Communicating How Unions Contribute to Community," 1991).

Kovacs (1981) suggests that college union professionals use assessment models to examine the interaction between students and college unions. Similarly, Osteen, Rue, and Van der Veer (1987)

support the idea that the college union is the crossroads of the higher education community. While these authors agree that there is an existing relationship between the professoriate and union professionals, a more concerted effort is needed. Principles which may be helpful to uphold as a prescription for success are inspired by a Carnegie Commission Report (1990):

> We proceed then with the conviction that if a balance can be struck between individual interests and shared concerns, a strong learning community will result. We believe that the six principles highlighted in this report--purposefulness, openness, justice, discipline, caring and celebration--can form the foundation on which a vital community of learning can be built. Now more than ever, colleges and universities should be guided by a larger vision. (p. 64)

In a later report, the Commission warns of danger if we do not teach students to look beyond personal satisfaction and ponder the responsibility of each individual for societal downfall due to lack of community:

> We need scholars who not only skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also integrate ideas, connect thought to action, and inspire students. The very complexity of modern life requires more, not less, information; more, not less, participation. If the nation's colleges and universities cannot help students see beyond themselves and better understand the interdependent nature of our world, each new generation's capacity to live responsibly will be dangerously diminished. (Boyer, 1990, p. 77)

The two reports express a similar sentiment. Common principles and interdependent action are predominant themes that also define the two most common components of community--common ties and social interaction (Hillery, 1955, p. 118). There is a need for an educational partnership to develop between academic and student affairs if a community of scholars and learners is to be achieved.

Common Ties and Social Interaction

The interest in building community among the professoriate and college union professionals lies in the holistic development of the student. An effort to put the student at the forefront of decisions made regarding a partnering of these two disparate groups can only result in building an alliance that will ultimately better serve the student. This, in turn, will perpetuate the historical link between the professoriate and the student affairs profession.

The history of higher education and the development of the student affairs profession are integrally tied to the development of the professoriate. The professoriate began to fill their time with research by the late nineteenth century and interest in teaching undergraduates waned (Rudolph, 1989). This loss of contact ultimately resulted in the view of the undergraduate student as a secondary priority for faculty. When the professoriate changed focus from teaching to research, many common bonds between student and teacher diminished.

In response to the faculty's specialization and isolation from students' day-to-day lives, the student affairs profession began to emerge. Harvard appointed the first college dean in 1870 to give special attention to discipline and enrollment management (Mueller, 1961). As time went by, more administrative positions were developed primarily to "free research-minded scholars from the detailed but necessary work that went into the management of an organized institution" (Rudolph, 1962, p. 434-435).

As the professoriate became more specialized so did the student affairs profession. The difference between the two centered on the amount of involvement with students. While student affairs work necessitated a high degree of contact and interaction with students, faculty were usually more detached from their students. Nonetheless, the common tie of a community of scholars remained as a transcending value.

The challenge today is to redirect and reward faculty for scholarship that emphasizes interaction with the student inside and outside the classroom:

> What students do in dining halls, on playing fields, and in the rathskeller late at night all combine to influence the outcome of the college education, and the challenge in the building of community, is to extend the resources for learning on the

campus and to see the academic life as interlocked (Boyer, 1987, p. 177).

College union and activities professionals need to generate a broader definition of their contribution to the community of scholars than service. Boyer (1990) writes: "Service often means not doing scholarship but doing good work. To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate, and flow directly out of, this professional activity" (p. 22). A parallel to the broader definition of scholarship can be found in the acceptance of the context of learning as it addresses the concept of the learning process. This process should be devoted to experiential learning in conjunction with intellectual development (Blake, 1979). Even earlier in the literature of the profession, Esther Lloyd-Jones and Margaret Ruth Smith called for "student personnel work as deeper teaching" (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1954).

Education is a people business. It is a profession that cannot be practiced absent of clientele. The challenge to the profession is to develop a community of scholars, a goal that necessitates a commonalty of goals and values and quality social interaction among faculty, staff, and students.

Common Ground

The Carnegie Foundation's work on the search for community expresses the belief that "with the six principles [of community] to

guide the conversation, faculty and administrators could meet on common ground when academic policies are considered [and that] student personnel officers also might find the principles useful in resolving matters affecting student life" (Carnegie Foundation, 1990, p. 66). The first element in defining a community becomes the social contract (Crookston, 1974). Over the years colleges and universities have stated these principles in their catalogs either as a creed or beliefs statement. Today, a vision statement embodying these principles often serves as a preamble to an institution's mission and purpose.

Whatever the origin or form of the social contract, it must be articulated and disseminated as a guide for those in the community. In its final form, a social contract states the behavioral expectations the community willingly subscribes to for the common good. In the words of the originator of *The Social Contract,* Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762/1954):

> If then, we exclude from the social contract everything not essential to it, we shall find that it reduces itself to the following terms: Each of us puts into the common pool, and under the sovereign control of the general will, his person and all his power. And we, as a community, take each member unto ourselves as an indivisible part of the whole. (p. 20)

Conclusion

The special reports of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching on *Campus Life* and *Scholarship Reconsidered* are natural extensions of *College.* It would be a major mistake not to use these reports as complementary pieces in a call to community on campuses across the nation. College union and activities professionals and the professoriate would be well-equipped to answer this call if they were conversant with their shared and distinct histories. The professoriate would strengthen its return to the scholarship of teaching by entering into a partnership with the college union professionals who value quality interaction with students beyond the classroom experience. In turn, student affairs professionals can fully contribute their expertise to a community of scholars by providing the context for integrating and applying knowledge in the life of the student.

The beginning link between student affairs and the professoriate lies in the articulation of a social contract--a common tie of principles and beliefs that give meaning to the collective work of each person in the community. The common ground is there if each of us chooses to extend ourselves. Separation and isolation from each other will not allow a community of scholars to be built. In a student's total development, the resources of the professionals and professoriate must fuse into a concerted plan.

Consequently, student affairs and academic leadership should join together to answer the call to community as it is heard on each campus. Separate responses will only lead to incomplete results and a fragmented sense of community for all its members: the student affairs professionals, the professoriate, and the students.

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