

Book Review:

Critical Issues for Student Affairs: Challenges and Opportunities

David Horton, Jr., Ed.S.
University of Florida

*Florida Journal of Educational
Administration & Policy*

Spring 2008
Volume 1, Issue 2

Keywords: Student Affairs; Diversity; Student Assessment

Sandeen, A. and Barr, M. J. (2006). *Critical issues for student affairs: Challenges and opportunities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-7879-7657-6

Critical Issues for Student Affairs: Challenges and Opportunities by Arthur Sandeen and Margaret Barr examined eight critical areas for student affairs professionals and professional associations to consider. Sandeen and Barr stated, "The impetus for this volume was to present critical issues that we believe must be answered by student affairs and higher education in the coming years" (p. ix.). The eight critical areas discussed at length in this volume were:

- the position of student affairs within the institutional structure;
- its role in teaching students about diversity;
- the ability to attract and retain diverse professionals;
- funding sources;
- the obligation to distant learners and those in non-traditional educational programs;
- assessments;
- the responsibility for students lives and well-being; and
- the purpose and impact of professional associations.

The authors challenged the reader to examine these eight topics through critical lenses and to participate in further dialogue within their departments, institutions, and throughout higher education.

Sandeen and Barr collectively bring well over 40 years of experience as vice presidents for student affairs. Having held both faculty and administrative responsibilities at Michigan State, Iowa State, and the University of Florida, Sandeen has gained substantial knowledge of student affairs and the respect of his colleagues through various means of university

service and scholarly work. Likewise, Barr brings an impressive knowledge of the field from similar experiences. Barr has worked as an executive with the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), in addition to faculty and professional positions held at Trenton State College, State University of New York at Binghamton, Northwestern University, Texas Christian University and the University of Texas.

Critical Issues for Student Affairs is intended for individuals working in student affairs, student affairs faculty members and graduate students enrolled in the appropriate preparatory programs. For the audience this volume is intended to serve, it provides a wealth of suggestions for actions which merit consideration for practice. The authors provided a vivid picture of the depth and multiplicity of works written on the topic of student affairs. This comprehensive review provides a substantial knowledge base for graduate students and individuals working in the field from backgrounds and disciplines focused in areas outside of student affairs.

Chapter 1 provided a summary of works on the field of student affairs. It begins with a review of seminal works that have laid the philosophical foundation such as the *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937; 1939). Sandeen and Barr noted that the *Student Personnel Point of View* (1937) is “a critical part of the foundation for student affairs” (p.5). It is with this document that the authors developed a recurring theme for not only the book, but the basis for which student affairs exist: to develop the whole student and to support the academic mission of the institution.

Sandeen and Barr also acknowledged the contributions to the field by scholars outside the profession of student affairs, but within higher education. They discussed the work of Ester Lloyd-Jones and M. R. Smith (1954), Nevitt Sanford (1962), and Ernest Boyer (1990) and recommended them to anyone in the field. Additionally, Sandeen and Barr reviewed two theory groups of major importance to the study of students and student affairs: student growth and development and organizational theory. Chapter 1 concludes with implications for graduate preparation programs and suggestions for action. For the intended audience--graduate students and student affairs professionals--the review of relevant literature enables the reader to gain a greater understanding of the lineage of the field and its evolution into what it is today.

The placement of Student Affairs within the institutional structure was discussed in chapter 2, and funding sources was discussed in chapter 9. It was recommended by the authors that, “student affairs leaders give careful attention to the administrative arrangement for their divisions and should analyze the advantages and disadvantages of various options” (p. 46). In chapter 5 the authors further contended that the manner in which the organization secures funds can have a great impact on the organization’s success and its ability to conduct business as normal. There are a number of ways in which student affairs departments can secure necessary funds. The key to successfully obtaining these funds, Sandeen and Barr stated, is for student affairs officers to become experts about their institutions’ budgets and to be participatory members of the funding process. They contended, “Good student affairs leaders are effective in securing resources, allocating them wisely, and managing these resources prudently” (p.97). As with the remaining chapters of the volume, a historical overview of the topic, foundational previous literary works and events were provided as a prelude to the topic at hand.

Chapter 2 continues with a historical chronology of the formal split of academics and student affairs in American higher education. The formal split of academics and student services, beginning at Harvard College in 1890, beacons the reader to the still-emerging role for student affairs. Sandeen and Barr discussed possible scenarios for the organization of student affairs within an institution and the pros and cons of each of the possible situations. It is suggested by the authors that there is “no organizational model that fits the needs of all institutions” (p. 41). Rather, the goal should be to position the organization in a place where it can be a vital part of the educational program of the institution. The chapter concluded with four recommendations for student affairs leaders to consider regarding student affairs placement in the institution’s organizational structure. They noted student affairs leaders should focus on gaining access to institutional resources; maintaining a strong commitment to student learning; understanding and embracing their role of producing a successful result for their students and institutions while educating themselves about the most pressing issues. The authors asserted these actions should be paramount, regardless of their position on the institutions’ organizational chart.

Chapters 3 and 4 discussed the role of student affairs and diversity. How can student affairs best help students learn about diversity is the primary question posed in chapter 3, and the organization’s role in attracting and retaining a diverse staff was presented in chapter 4. The 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement saw the beginning of an era in student affairs that focused its attention on access and the elimination of barriers to inclusion for African Americans. This focus was later advanced to include efforts for recognition of individual rights for all races, religions, genders and sexual orientations. The authors maintained that student affairs and student affairs professionals have, “served as positive role models for students when they have mediated volatile issues with sensitivity, invited previously ignored groups into campus life, advocated for just causes others did not have the courage to confront...” (p.63). Sandeen and Barr suggested that the profession should continue to value students as individuals and not solely as groups of students. Furthermore, they encouraged student affairs leaders to become stronger and more visible leaders on diversity issues on their campus.

Student affairs’ efforts to educate students about diversity are created in their ability to organize students from varying backgrounds, cultures and religions to work collectively towards a common goal. This education is also accomplished through the institution’s commitment to hiring and retaining a diverse staff. Chapter 4 examined the importance of staff diversity as suggested in the literary works, *A Perspective on Student Affairs* (1989) and *General Standards and Guidelines* (2003) produced by the Council on the Advancement of Standards. Sandeen and Barr described and elaborated on the challenges and barriers to achieving staff diversity. Undefined pathways for entry to the profession and advancement within the profession, work conditions, job expectations, and compensation are suggested as some of the present challenges to diversity discussed. Sandeen and Barr strongly encouraged professional associations and student affairs leaders to find new ways to recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds to the profession, and to retain them once employed. Gaining a greater understanding of the dimensions of the problem is the first step, stated the authors.

Student affairs’ role in providing services and programs to students regardless of their mode of instruction was discussed in chapter 6. Student affairs departments are typically comprised of various sub-departments across a given campus. How student affairs and its

departments assist and serve distant learners was discussed in the latter portion of the chapter. Distance education, as suggested by the author, is a growing trend in American higher education. What was once limited to study-abroad and exchange programs has evolved into students enrolled in an institution solely through online instruction. The authors encouraged student affairs professionals to set boundaries for service, and to examine these boundaries through ethical and legal frames. As new technologies arrive with the ability to serve students in different cities, states, even countries, student affairs must examine their role and ability to provide students with adequate assistance and service. With new opportunities come new challenges. The authors cautioned the profession against the abdication of their control of their programs to new technologies. The authors stated, "Just because it is possible to do something does not mean that it should be done" (p. 126). They argue that some services such as counseling services should continue to be a service provided to students in the traditional manner.

Chapter 7 began with a review of the background of assessment, and moves to a discussion of its problems and function in student affairs. It was stated by the authors that a major reason assessment was not viewed as a primary function of the field was due to limited allocation of funds to perform assessment, minimal expertise held by professionals in evaluation and research methods, and the fear that unfavorable result may come from the review of provided services. They stated, "student affairs is likely to, "avoid certain issues or only to conduct safe studies that will not reflect poorly on their programs or impinge on areas outside student affairs" (p. 144). The authors acknowledged that assessment is seen by the profession as imperative to its work. However, they have left the task of assessment to researchers and educators outside of the field of student affairs. Contributing to the causes for the lack of assessment practices is the realization that very often there is little agreement on what is important to study. The authors charged senior student affairs leaders to become knowledgeable about assessment, and to become strong advocates for greater participation of student affairs in campus-wide assessment.

The final two chapters examined student affairs' role in the responsibility of student lives and well-being and the current and previous role professional associations have played throughout the existence of the profession. Chapter 8 begins with a background of student affairs role and its departure from the long conceived idea of *loco parentis*. The authors interjected that the changing environment of higher education from times past require higher education and student affairs professionals to reconsider the lives of their students. The authors recommended that the profession critically examine its involvement in student lives from philosophical, practical and financial perspectives. The final chapter of the volume begins with a brief history of professional associations, and continues with a discussion of their past influence and projected future potential impact on the field. It is the opinion of the authors that these professional associations have been a major prong in the continued success of the profession since the twentieth century. However, they encouraged association leaders to find ways to contribute a harmonious voice on important issues to higher education instead of their current fragmented whimper. Sandeen and Barr stated that the expansion and specialization of professional associations, "has robbed student affairs of an effective and coherent voice within higher education community" (p. 195). The authors advocated for greater collaboration between associations for the benefit of higher education as a whole. Though, one wonders how the authors would respond to individuals who challenged this

assumption from a global perspective. Can it be said that the growth of diversely focused association add a specialized group of professional that are better able to meet the needs of a diverse student population? Nonetheless, their point is a salient one.

Arthur Sandeen and Margaret Barr have provided a well-written text that supplies a catalyst for future dialogues on the topic of critical issues facing student affairs. Their intent and core purpose was to bring areas they perceived as critical to the attention of graduate students, student affairs professionals and associations for the purpose of creating continued dialogue about these issues. They have provided a strong basis and sound argument for the issues they presented. The presented arguments and statements were supported with pertinent literary works for which the profession was built and on which it continues to build. These works guide the volume through the presentation of the eight critical issues. This copious, yet selective review of previous works provides the reader a literary map of primary sources written about and for student affairs professionals. The authors acknowledged in the preface that they do not intend to have all the right answers to the presented questions. Nor do they feel that these are the only areas of concern for student affairs and higher education.

In conclusion, Sandeen and Barr have provided a basis and template for further dialogue on these critical issues. They have supplied a strong starting point with their review of relevant literature and recommended actions. However, they leave the reader grasping for more. This text has synthesized decades of works written on student affairs and higher education into a user's guide for the profession, but has omitted the pictures to illustrate samples of product. As a primer for graduate students pursuing a career in student affairs, this was a great platform to present practical examples lived out by the well-experienced authors. The presentation of examples from their life work can provide value to the conversation, and offer illustrations of these suggested actions in practice. Furthermore, such practical examples offer hope to new professionals and illustrate that there truly is an opportunity for growth in every presented challenge.

References

- American Council on Education. (1937). *The student personnel point of view*. American Council on Education Studies, Series 1 (1). Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.
- American Council on Education. (1949). *The student personnel point of view* (revised ed.), American Council on Education Studies 6. Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Campus life: In search of community*. San Francisco: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2003). *Standards and guidelines*. Washington, D. C.: Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.
- Kitchener, K. S. (1985). Ethical principles and ethical decisions in student affairs. In H. Cannon and R. Brown (eds.), *New Directions for Higher Education: Applied Ethics in Student Services*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lloyd-Jones, E and Smith, M. R. (1954). Student personnel work as deeper teaching. New York: Harper and Brass.

National Association of Student Personnel Administration (1989). A perspective on student affairs. In Points of View. Washington, D. C.: NASPA.

David Horton is completing a doctoral program in higher education administration at the University of Florida. His research interests include community college student success, with a specific focus on the academic assessment of community college student athletes.

Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy

Spring 2008
Volume 1
Issue 2

Observing the Learner-Centered Class

57 - 66

Michael Harris, Roxanne Cullen

To Test (or not) in Arena Settings

67 - 78

Derick M. Kiger

Enthusiastic Educational Leadership

79 - 97

Jill Frymier Russell

Challenges of the Public School Superintendency: Differences by
Tenure and District Location

98 - 109

*Daniel Trevino, Jr., Richard T. Braley, Michelle Stallone Brown,
John R. Slate*

Book Reviews

Accountable Teacher Evaluation! Toward Highly Qualified and Competent Teachers
by Andrews, H. A.

110 - 113

Diane Archer-Banks

Critical Issues for Student Affairs: Challenges and Opportunities by Sandeen, A. and
Barr, M. J.

114 - 119

David Horton, Jr.

Instructional Supervision Applying Tools and Concepts by Zepeda, S. J.

120 - 123

Karen Melvin

Editorial Board of the
Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy

Editor

Linda Serra Hagedorn
University of Florida

Associate Editors

Christopher M. Mullin
University of Florida

Syraj Syed
University of Florida

Assistant Editor

Christopher Coogan
University of Florida

Book Review Editor

Ben Walker
University of Florida

The Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy is published biannually, in Fall and Spring by the Department of Educational Administration & Policy at the University of Florida. The contents of the journal may be located at www.fjeap.org, or by visiting the department's webpage www.education.ufl.edu/leadership.

The Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy is an online, blind, peer-reviewed journal published by the department of Educational Administration & Policy at the University of Florida's College of Education. The journal seeks to serve as an outlet for poignant and rigorous research and study, as well as provide a venue for quality research reviews and thought provoking commentaries. Manuscript submission is open to all, with a special invitation to graduate students. For more information regarding the Journal, submission guidelines and the review process please visit the website www.fjeap.org.

© 2008 by the Department of Educational Administration and Policy.