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New Deanship Recognizes the Importance of Student Engagement

Therese Kattner

Institutions are beginning to create jobs that recognize by name the importance of student engagement in and out of the classroom.

These positions are based on the idea that students who contribute actively to their learning environments—through experiences such as learning communities, service-learning, first-year seminars, and undergraduate research—are more likely to succeed in college.

Fairfield University in Connecticut recently appointed a dean of academic engagement to help lead its efforts in using what have been identified as “high-impact practices”—the engaged learning approaches that boost student success, according to research.

Dr. Elizabeth Boquet, who had been associate dean of Fairfield’s College of Arts and Sciences, began her work as dean of engaged learning in mid-July.

Three factors led to the new job’s creation, she says: the arrival of a new president, strategic planning to aid the president’s transition, and self-study for accreditation.

“What we came to realize through the process of self-study ... is that we had a number of areas—curricular in nature and academic in nature, but not necessarily happening in the classroom—that hadn’t had a lot of

development,” says Boquet.

To further acknowledge the out-of-classroom component of engaged learning, Boquet’s position was created as a paired position with one in student affairs, the dean of student development, held by Dr. Deborah Cady Melzer.

“The idea is that we collaborate substantially to integrate living and learning on campus and to break down the divisional barriers,” Boquet says. “I report through academic affairs, and she reports through student affairs, but we’ve been crossing over a lot.”

One of the most exciting things about the paired deanships is that they make collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs a permanent part of the university structure, Boquet says. It’s helpful to have not only the working relationship between the two divisions, but also the administration’s support for that relationship, she says.

In addition, the paired deanships help Fairfield fulfill its mission to educate the whole person, she says. “We’re a Jesuit institution and we’re really trying to highlight conversations around community—around intentional, deliberate decision making—and so we’re happy about the way the positions came together.”

Goals

In the next few years, Boquet’s and

More on High-Impact Practices

Much of the interest in engaged learning has been furthered by the 2008 report “High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter.” The publication, written by George Kuh, identifies engaged learning practices and presents research indicating that such practices indeed aid student development and retention. (Information on ordering the publication is available through www.aacu.org.)

For more on how student affairs staff contribute to these practices, see Kathleen Manning’s article on “High-Impact Student Affairs” in the June 1, 2009, issue of *Student Affairs Leader*.

Melzer’s major goals are to

- **educate the community about high-impact educational practices and ensure that all Fairfield students have access to those practices**

“We have faculty, staff, and students who are already involved in a lot of these [high-impact] practices, so if you looked at our institutional profile, you would say, ‘Well, they’re doing pretty good,’”

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Boquet says. “But the questions we haven’t been asking are questions about who’s not able to access these opportunities right now and what the factors are that are affecting access.”

Students in certain majors, for instance, might have difficulty fitting study abroad into their disciplines’ course sequences, Boquet says.

“So we’re looking at educating faculty to have conversations much, much earlier with students about their academic planning choices, and I think that corresponds a lot to a much more intentional approach to retention and to students’ experiences over the course of their academic careers.”

- **help faculty develop their advising skills**

“We’re focusing on an advising-as-teaching model so that faculty begin to see advising as linked to the other ways that they think about themselves as teachers, and as linked to the ways that students see themselves as developing socially, intellectually, and ethically,” Boquet says.

- **continue to develop residential learning communities**

Although Fairfield already offers residential learning experiences, the objective is to have more systematic oversight of

them and to link them more intentionally to high-impact educational practices.

- **coordinate peer-learning opportunities**

“That’s going to include everything from developing a peer advising system so that we begin to use peer leaders in our academic advising to bringing together our various peer teaching areas,” which include student-athlete tutoring and math center tutoring, Boquet says.

Challenges

Major challenges so far have included setting up and organizing the partnership, including shifting reporting lines and deciding how to share budgets, Boquet says.

“As you can imagine, lots of things at institutions are set up for a single decision maker, and so when we really start to collaborate across divisions, questions will come up. Some things will probably have to have a decider, but at least that will come about as the result of a conversation.”

Boquet says she’s been happy with the support the deanships have received from other faculty, staff, and administrators. “I was concerned, given the economic times, about the creation of a new position and how people would receive it. But everyone has said, ‘This position makes a lot of sense.’” ●

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members. However, such hard decisions need to be made, for it is impossible to continue to do everything that you used to do when you had more resources.

Recommendations

Share with each other what you have missed the most (and the least), gather data on what students have missed the most (and the least), and use those candid discussions to help you plan and implement your “new normal.”

These questions are the first—but not the last—you should ask as you prepare

for the return of fiscal resources. It is clear that we do not believe that things will revert to exactly what they were prior to the economic downturn, but we do believe that you, with thoughtful planning, can create a new vision of where your department wants to go and how it will look when it gets to that point.

Arthur Sandeen, Ph.D., and Margaret J. Barr, Ph.D., together have more than 45 years’ experience as vice presidents of student affairs. They are both contributing editors for Student Affairs Leader. ●

College gambling task force recommendations: The Task Force on College Gambling Policies was recently created by the Division on Addictions at Cambridge Health Alliance (a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School) and funded by the National Center for Responsible Gaming (a nonprofit organization funded mainly by donations from the gaming industry).

The task force has released 10 recommendations for colleges and universities, including the recommendation that campuses respond to problem gambling among students with the same intensity with which they approach problem alcohol use. Other recommendations include:

- Establishing an institution-wide committee to develop and monitor a comprehensive gambling policy
- Ensuring that college policies are consistent with local, state, and federal laws
- Adjusting disciplinary actions applied to students who violate gambling rules if the students seek help from health or counseling services
- Using evidence-based strategies to help students with gambling problems
- Increasing counseling services' capacities to identify and treat gambling disorders

Greater detail on the recommendations is available at www.ncrg.org/public_education/task-force-college-gambling-policies.cfm.

In other student-related gambling news:

- The chief executive of GamCare, a United Kingdom organization that offers resources to people with gambling problems, recently told the Guardian that GamCare's help line is receiving more calls from students who are using online poker to try to pay off college debt.
- Harding University in Arkansas is

including the state's new lottery in the university's ban on student gambling. Initially, the administrators of the school, which is affiliated with the Church of Christ, decided to exempt the lottery from the ban but then reversed their decision. The Associated Press reports that some public schools in the state, including Arkansas State University, the University of Central Arkansas, and the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, ban students from gambling on campus too, but that these bans would apply only to buying—not scratching off—lottery tickets on campus.

Healthy parent-student interactions: Earlier this fall, we asked readers to submit analogies or terms they find useful in describing appropriate family-college student interactions. (See "Time to Retire 'Helicopter Parent?'" September 15.) We received the following from Kay Kimball Gruder, a certified parent coach and founder of Successful College Parenting:

When our child is learning to drive, we can't physically sit in the driver's seat with him or her, yet we are still part of the journey. As passengers, we offer encouragement, because we know that criticizing leads to unfruitful arguments. We make suggestions when asked, because if we continuously offer unsolicited driving advice we know it falls on deaf ears. We try to stay informed about how our child is feeling behind the wheel, so that we can offer additional support or recommend resources. We usually feel compelled to point out any impending danger, though we know it might not be met with immediate acknowledgment. We protect our child by helping him or her to develop tools and strategies to handle various driving and road-related situations, because we recognize that we won't always be the passenger. But we never physically take over the driver's seat, because we know that it is only meant for one. We know we have effectively parented when our student can take the wheel. ●

Resources

Mental health and alcohol abuse conferences: NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) will hold its Mental Health Conference and its Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention & Intervention Conference simultaneously on January 14-16, 2010, in New Orleans. More information is available at <http://naspa.org/programs/mb/> and <http://www.naspa.org/programs/aapcl>.

Campus suicide prevention website: The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has created new web pages for colleges and universities. The pages feature sections on campus data and on how to develop a campus program, including evaluation of program results. More information is available at www2.sprc.org/collegesanduniversities/index.

Report on student civic engagement: A report by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, "Civic Responsibility: What Is the Campus Climate for Learning?" argues that higher education isn't living up to its promise to promote students' ability to contribute positively to society. A third of the 24,000 students surveyed said they "felt strongly" that their institutions had helped them acquire skills necessary to make a difference. But courses and organizations that require service do make a difference in students' level of civic engagement, the report notes. Information on ordering the report is available through www.aacu.org. ●

Preventing and Responding to Student Conduct Issues Abroad

A study-abroad site is a university in miniature, facing the same—if not greater—student health and safety risks as the home campus. But, of course, the study-abroad site has far fewer resources.

As a result, the institution must make the most of its expertise at home, said Gary Rhodes, Ph.D., and Michael Sachs, J.D., during the October 6 online seminar “Study Abroad & Student Affairs: Best Practices in Health/Safety.”

Student affairs and study-abroad educators must pool their knowledge to create health and safety policies and procedures—particularly student codes of conduct—that address the unique situations facing students abroad, Rhodes and Sachs said.

Conduct issues unique to study abroad

When asking campuses if their codes of conduct cover students abroad, Sachs said that he often receives the reply, “Of course it does; it covers everything.”

Their codes might include a line saying that the code’s terms apply to students in any sponsored program around the world. But such lines do not address conduct concerns that are specific to study abroad, Sachs said.

These concerns include the following:

The code of conduct’s reach

Because study abroad is a 24-hour-a-day experience, it’s difficult to determine when a study-abroad student is “on the clock” and must abide by the code of conduct, Sachs said.

As a result, questions a collaborative team might need to answer include the following:

- Does the conduct code still apply when a student is at home with a host family or in a residence hall at the host institution?
- What about when a student goes out for a dinner that’s not a scheduled

part of the program?

- What if the faculty member is there, but only to socialize?

Alcohol and drug use

It’s important for study-abroad, student affairs, and faculty representatives to review the institution’s alcohol policy and code of conduct to see if they apply to different study-abroad experiences, Rhodes said.

Questions to consider include the following:

- Should students hailing from a dry campus be able to drink alcohol abroad if the faculty member believes that alcohol use is an important part of the cultural experience (sampling wine in Italy or France, for example)?
- Should students who are too young to drink legally in the United States be allowed to drink at program events if they are old enough to drink legally in the destination country?
- If the policy for students abroad is different from the policy for students on the home campus, how will the differences be explained to students in a way that doesn’t send mixed messages or undermine the home campus policy?
- How will students be educated about alcohol use in their destination country and appropriate consumption and behavior?
- How will alcohol-related conduct code violations be adjudicated abroad?

If drugs that are illegal in the United States are legal in destination countries, the questions a collaborative team must answer are much like alcohol-related questions, according to Rhodes.

However, some destination countries take a much more punitive approach to

drug use than the United States, Rhodes said. Some nations, for example, impose the death penalty for using certain drugs. As a result, students must be educated about those laws in predeparture orientation, he said.

Removal from a program

Institutions also need to develop policies and procedures for removing a student from a study-abroad program that answer the following questions:

- What situations merit removal?
- How will the removal process be adjudicated?
- How will a removed student get home?
- Who will pay the return trip’s expense?

Sachs related a situation in which a student removed from a program could have faced significant dangers: “The faculty member dropped the person from the program, took the keys for the room, put the person on the doorstep, and said, ‘Go home.’ They were in China.”

Another question regards academic dishonesty: Can students found responsible for academic dishonesty continue in a program but fail the course, or do they have to leave the program entirely?

This is typically not a question people at the home campus face. At the home campus, “if somebody in the residence hall gets an F in math, we generally don’t kick them out of the residence hall,” Sachs said. “And the reverse is usually true, too; if a person gets kicked out of a residence hall, we don’t give them an F in math.”

It’s not enough just to put the policies in place—students, staff, and faculty must know what they are, as well, Sachs added. “You have to make

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sure that these processes are clearly delineated and that students know what the consequences are.”

Due process in adjudication

When adjudicating behavioral or academic dishonesty cases, study-abroad educators should know if there are timelines that are set out by the code of conduct to which they must adhere.

For example, Sachs said, a code of conduct might guarantee students a certain amount of time to appeal a decision. But if you’re in a short-term study-abroad program—one that’s only three weeks long—is there enough time to abide by the code of conduct’s tenets?

“The question needs to be asked,” Sachs said. “You need to review your [adjudication] processes to see if in fact you do have study abroad covered in both scope and specificity.”

If the “regular” adjudication process will not work for study-abroad programs, the following questions must be addressed:

- How do you make the adjudication process as fair to study-abroad students as they are to students at home?
- How do you guarantee the study-abroad student some sort of due process in adjudication of alleged code of conduct or academic honesty violations?

These questions apply to both public and private institutions, Sachs asserted.

“As an attorney, I know that there are certain requirements that public institutions must follow in terms of due process, in terms of appeals, in terms of things they must do within their codes of conduct. Those all have to be maintained, absolutely,” Sachs said.

“Private institutions have a little more

flexibility; however, the courts have made it very clear, across the board, that you can have various policies in place but that you must enforce them—that is the key. You must follow them, enforce them, and make sure they’re enforced fairly.”

Strategies and solutions

In addition to highlighting the questions a collaborative student affairs/study-abroad team must ask and answer, Sachs and Rhodes also offered practical steps the teams can take to head off conduct concerns.

Screening applicants

Rhodes and Sachs recommended having program applicants sign a release of information that allows different parts of campus to communicate about previous conduct difficulties or special support needs. (When asking about special needs, the point is not to screen out disabled students but to understand how or if the program can reasonably accommodate them.)

After students have signed the releases, provide lists of applicants to offices on campus, including those that handle conduct, student health, psychological services, and services for students with special needs.

If an institution collects such information, however, it must develop a process for reviewing it, Sachs said.

“If you get all this information and you don’t do anything with it, then that becomes a real problem in terms of liability if something should occur.”

Maintaining communication

During the adjudication process, staff and faculty abroad should maintain communication with colleagues at the home campus as well as with the international partners, Rhodes said. Students should be asked to sign a release of

information that allows this communication.

Creating or modifying a code of conduct

Sachs noted that institutions can choose among three options in making sure that their student codes of conduct address study-abroad students:

- Expanding the existing code to include students abroad
- Creating a separate code of conduct for students abroad
- Creating a hybrid that incorporates students abroad into the existing code but notes that some types of adjudication will occur upon a student’s return to the home campus

Whatever option an institution chooses, it must make sure it’s codified and signed by students, Sachs said.

Being clear about expectations

The institution should be clear with students in predeparture orientation, on-site orientation, and throughout the program about how the institution expects them to act, Rhodes said.

“One of the things that many study-abroad programs do is develop a ‘conditions of participation’ form that sets out these expectations,” he said.

But institutions also need to communicate these expectations to faculty, staff, and international hosts.

“The other critical issue I think, in all of these areas, is that we really need to communicate closely with our faculty and staff who are with our students, as well as all our international partners, so they understand what our expectations are and what our policies are like,” Rhodes said. ●

perspectives

Issues to Consider If Financial Support Returns

Q: My department had to absorb some large budget cuts over the last two years. Morale is low and the workload is high, so we can't wait to get back to how it used to be. With the economy turning around, when do you think we can return to "normal" operations?

Arthur Sandeen and Margaret Barr reply:

Forecasting the future is difficult at best, but we doubt that even when greater financial support returns to higher education, it will be "like it used to be." We believe that you and your colleagues will need to begin to think about a "new normal" and develop some ideas on how that could be both productive and energizing for you.

As you plan for a "new normal," we ask you to consider the following questions:

1) What items that were cut or reduced from the budget really made a difference in the quality of programs and services your department provides to students?

Our view is that some things that were cut really don't need to be reintroduced, and that some things, if reinstated, would make a difference in program quality.

Let's say that before the budget cuts, your department spent a substantial amount printing brochures about your office and developing posters and mailings to publicize events. However, after the budget cuts, you and your colleagues used more innovative ways to attract students to programs and services, including web pages, blogs, e-mails, and instant messages. If money returns to your department, you should get a sense of how effective your new means of communication are *before* you begin to design and distribute brochures again. You might be surprised and end up with a new approach to event publicity and

marketing.

Departmental decisions regarding replacing personnel also need to be carefully considered. Examine the staffing pattern you had in the past and the one you have currently. What is not being done that was done in the past? Is that function and activity crucial for the department's success in meeting its mission? What would you like to do that can't be done because of reduced staffing, and are those activities critical to the long-term success of the unit?

On many campuses, staff members voluntarily accepted a reduced appointment from 12 months to 9 or 10 months. What was gained and what was lost because of those changes?

Answers to these questions will help you and your colleagues determine whether or not you need to return to the old staffing pattern or consider a new staffing approach.

2) What new programs and services need to be developed to meet students' needs?

The changed economic conditions will likely continue to affect current students as they graduate. Although the economic situation appears to be edging toward firmer ground, many are still concerned about unemployment. Recent data indicates that new college graduates are not being employed as quickly as those who graduated before them. So even if your department is not directly affiliated with career planning and placement, you may want to support, for example, the addition of job development specialist positions in the career office.

You also might want to consider whether or not your institution should focus more on fiscal literacy for students. On the whole, higher education has not paid much attention to this issue, and recent events across the country have illustrated young adults' need for fiscal

literacy to help them succeed in life.

In addition, you should examine whether or not the characteristics of your student body have altered over the last couple of years. Student demographics at many institutions have changed as older adults return to school for retraining, young women and men leave the armed forces, and unemployment rises. Those new populations may have different needs for services, and you should carefully consider those needs as resources return to your unit.

3) Are there technological innovations that should be funded in order to continue to communicate effectively with the members of your campus community and their families?

Technological applications change very quickly over a short time. Websites usually need to be upgraded, new communication devices (such as PDAs) need to be considered, and decisions need to be made about which previously postponed upgrades should be implemented.

Attention needs to be paid to whether or not your unit wants a presence on social networking sites, and if so, how that presence will be maintained. As new technology is adopted, a budget plan will be needed to support the new technology over the coming fiscal years.

4) What are you doing that needs to stop?

After budgets were cut, many student affairs staffs across the country tried to continue to do everything that they have always done, even with fewer people and less money. That pace cannot be kept up forever, and it is clear that as part of your "new normal," you will need to decide what programs and services need to stop.

That will meet with some resistance from staff, students, parents, and faculty

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