# "Whole" Learning Student Affairs' Challenge to College Curriculums

PAUL WILLIAM EATON Louisiana State University

DISCUSSIONS OF CURRICULUM IN HIGHER EDUCATION are monopolistically focused on the classroom experience. Whether analyzing disciplinary course offerings, credit hours, pedagogy, or general education, post-secondary curriculum discourses have privileged the classroom experience despite an understanding that learning occurs across a spectrum of environments and experiences. College administrators have responded to their understanding that learning occurs in multiple contexts through development of student-focused initiatives, typically located in divisions of student affairs. Since the field's inception, student affairs divisions and educators have existed not only to provide key services to students, but more broadly to challenge the college curriculum to be more expansive on individual campuses, nationally, and internationally.

#### Structure, Disciplining, & Vocation

Gaining a full appreciation for the role of student affairs as challenger of the college curriculum requires examining the history of structuring, disciplining, and vocationalizing of the university experience. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the culture of method proposed by Descartes and Bacon shifted epistemologies and societal practices. Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (Weissman, 1996) was totalizing, quickly gaining traction in the linear, hierarchical structuring not only of philosophy and science, but also the university experience. Method introduced deduction and reduction into inquiry. Resultantly, areas of science and study that were previously connected were broken into their component parts, no longer studied holistically, but rather studied in isolation. While method greatly assisted scientific discovery, the effects on academic specialization and learning were profound.

Peter Ramus is credited with creating the structure of the university experience through his Ramist charts (Doll, 2005, 2008). The charts, first introduced in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, strictly structured university courses and sought to bring "order and discipline to university and college life and study" (Doll, 2005, p. 24) through the ordering of learning experiences "from the most general to the particular and special" (Doll, 2005, p. 25). Beyond structuring the university

experience in a linear and hierarchical manner, Ramist charts are also responsible for the creation of academic disciplines. The development of "a series of disciplinary oriented courses leading to a degree" (Doll, 2008, p. 181) was quickly adopted by universities in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Learning was divided into "various, sequential units" (Doll, 2008, p. 188) occurring at finite moments – namely through individual study or in classrooms. As Doll (2008) notes,

This Ramist/Protestant sense of method–separating knowledge from oral conversation, and bifurcating such knowledge into a hierarchal sequence of linear steps–has dominated scientific and intellectual thought from the 17th through 20th centuries, and remains a foundation for mainstream pedagogy today. (p. 183)

Academic discipline quickly became tied to career and vocation, further fracturing the learning experience and minimizing the function of college education. This emphasis on learning for purposes of vocation also narrowed discussions about the scope of college curriculums.

Doll (2008) notes that the function of college education has always been tied to career or vocation. Those who attended the earliest universities traditionally received instruction in theology, law, or medicine (Doll, 2008). These traditions of providing advanced education for specific career fields, along with linear structure and hierarchy, were carried across the Atlantic and took root in the earliest American colleges and universities. The foundation of Harvard, Dartmouth, and other colonial universities was tied almost exclusively to educating vocational leaders of the colonies (Rudolph & Thelin, 1990; Thelin, 2004). This point is further examined by Martin (1991), who stated "even in the halcyon days of liberal arts colleges . . .the end of the educational experience to which everything else was a means . . .was career training" (p. 402).

Though rooted in the traditions of linearity, structure, and academic discipline, American higher education began developing much broader foci that had tremendous impact on the curriculum (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977; Delbanco, 2012; Robson, 1985; Thelin, 2004). The colonists viewed higher education as part of a necessary process of "building character and promoting distinctive habits of thought" (Thelin, 2004, p. 64). The result was the structuring of a curriculum that focused on studies of classical text, languages, sciences, law, and history (Robson, 1985). The classic curriculum developed at many institutions in America, including the University of Virginia, where the course of study "included modern languages, sciences, and architecture" (Thelin, 2004, p. 51). The earliest college administrators believed they were not instructing students just for vocation, but for larger purposes of serving their communities and defending democracy (Robson, 1985).

However, curriculum in American higher education could not always satisfy the needs of an expanding society and student demographic. The faculty of Yale College had to defend the classical curriculum, including the acquisition of language skills in Latin or Greek, against a growing public sentiment focused on the utility and function of higher learning. Their influential Yale Report of 1828 not only defended traditional curriculum, but also traditional pedagogy (Delbanco, 2012; Rudolph & Thelin, 1990; Thelin, 2004). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed and America expanded, "critics of the college curriculum" argued "that the standard pedagogy – daily recitations and a punitive system of grading – was intellectually uninteresting" (Thelin, 2004, p. 64). The Yale Report of 1828 is an early instance of another tradition in American higher education: arguing about the utility of academic majors, courses, and functions of a college degree. Thelin (2004) describes the role of vocation in many curricular changes within American higher education, both historically and contemporaneously. Throughout the 19th century, colleges and universities began the process of professionalizing and implementing new courses of study. New academic disciplines emerged "in such fields as agriculture, the military, science, and engineering" (Thelin, 2004, p. 58), and even expanded into areas such as etiquette and home economics (Solomon, 1985; Thelin, 2004) as women gained access to higher education. Simultaneously, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a restructuring of the college curriculum, with students taking general courses in their first two years and "juniors and seniors opting for a 'major' field" (Thelin, 2004, p. 129). Highly specialized fields, such as law or medicine, soon moved out of the purview of undergraduate education and into the world of graduate studies (Thelin, 2004).

# **Complicating the Conversation of College Curriculum**

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the strict academic disciplining of American colleges and universities led to several curricular reforms in content and structure of the academic experience (Thelin, 2004). However, almost all curricular reforms during this time focused on a curricular experience that occurred within a classroom environment or within an increasing number of academic majors. Given the history of how universities came to be structured, siloed, and vocationalized during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is not surprising that "discussions of curriculum have focused variously on the set of courses a college offers, the particular courses students take" (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 1) or that "almost everyone thinks of the curriculum as a set of courses or experiences needed to complete a college degree" (Stark & Lattuca, 1997, p. 7).

The field of curriculum theory has developed to counter such limiting notions and understandings of curriculum. Pinar's (2012) conception of curriculum as a "complicated conversation" (p. xiii) is rooted in an understanding of education as more than mere classroom experiences that are measured beyond the confines of standardized accountability, assessments, and test scores. He articulates curriculum theory "as a field of scholarly inquiry within the broad academic field of education that endeavors to understand curriculum as educational experience" (p. 30).

Pinar's (2012) analysis of curriculum as a "complicated conversation," which views education as process and experience, is a helpful framework for understanding the development of student affairs on American college campuses. The field of student affairs has consistently sought to conceptualize college student learning as a complicated conversation, without necessarily using these words. Since the field's inception, student affairs has existed as a direct challenge to the strict academic disciplinary, compartmentalized structuring of the university and student learning experience. As Roper (2001) notes, "student affairs is the historic name of our organizations, but this name may not accurately represent who we are and what we do on most of our campuses" (p. 398). Challenging the academic curriculum, pedagogy, and practice of higher education is one function of student affairs educators.

Thelin (2004) believes the profession of student affairs developed as early as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when "college presidents were. . .left with the growing problems of an unruly, autonomous student culture" (p. 198). As a solution, universities hired "a growing number of deans and assistant deans whose main responsibility was policing student conduct" (Thelin, 2004, p. 198). Thelin's assessment of student affairs is rooted almost entirely in an analysis of

student population growth and unruly students. His characterizations of student affairs existing solely as an effort of universities to "control or co-opt" (Thelin, 2004, p. 65) student activity "by assimilating it into the formal structure (and convenants) of the university" (Thelin, 2004, p. 65) is simplistically unimaginative. Such characterizations lead to the continuing belief that student affairs professionals exist simply to manage student processes or extracurricular activities.

Many attribute the publication of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (SPPV) in 1937 as the event that created the field of student affairs (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012; Evans & Reason, 2001; Nuss, 2003). The publication of the *SPPV*, and many of the guiding principles of the student affairs profession, occurred at a unique historical moment. One of the principle architects of the *SPPV*, Esther Lloyd Jones, was studying and completing her dissertation at Columbia University, where John Dewey was working and advancing his viewpoints on education. Dewey was principally concerned with articulating a new philosophy of education rooted in experiential learning, environmental context, individual learning plans, and the democratization of education. One of Dewey's principal works, *Experience and Education*, was published just one year after *The Student Personnel Point of View*.

A close reading of *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938), alongside *The Student Personnel Point of View*, demonstrates that student affairs work is clearly influenced by the concepts of learning articulated by Dewey. In examining the history of education, Dewey (1938) outlines the near obsession of the either-or dichotomy of learning, resulting in "opposition between the idea that education is development from within or that it is formation from without" (p. 17). Discrediting such an account of learning, he (1938) goes on to describe "the experiential continuum" (p. 28) of learning. The central premise of this philosophy of education is not only that all experience counts as education, but that educators have a responsibility to ensure that educational environments and experiences are conducive for student growth, learning, and development. For Dewey (1938), "experience does not occur in a vacuum" (p. 40), and "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). Therefore, educators should be concerned with the quality of all learning experiences, not just those occurring inside the classroom.

The Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) clearly articulates a vision that the profession of student affairs should challenge the academy to think of learning and curriculum beyond the confines of classroom or academic disciplinary learning. The authors of the document were not unaware of the challenges facing colleges or universities, or of the faculty that taught in the classroom. They recognized "the pressures upon faculty members to contribute to the growth of knowledge" which "shifted the direction of their thinking to a preoccupation with subject matter and a neglect of the student as an individual" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 9). Though Thelin (2004) argues that student affairs arose strictly to provide services or police unruly students, the SPPV recognized that "personnel officers have been appointed throughout the colleges and universities of this country to undertake a number of educational responsibilities which were once entirely assumed by teaching members of the faculty" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 10). The rise of strict academic disciplines and structures led to the neglect of important outcomes of higher education. Among those cited by the SPPV are clarification of purpose, "progression in religious, emotional, social development, and other nonacademic personal and group relationships" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 11), and students "physical and mental health" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 11). In short, the SPPV challenged the university to view education as a holistic experience, and to broaden the educational experience to "the development of the student as a person rather than upon his [sic] intellectual training alone" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 9).

Challenging classroom pedagogy became an additional important role of student affairs' approach to complicating the conversation about curriculum on college campuses. In both the original document, and the revised and re-issued *SPPV*, published in 1949, the field of student affairs began questioning the effectiveness of classroom pedagogy. One function of student affairs educators, according to the original *SPPV*, is "assembling and making available information to be used in improvement of instruction and in making the curriculum more flexible (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 12). Challenging pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, the *SPPV* boldly stated, "instruction itself involves far more than the giving of information on the part of the teacher and its acceptance by the student" (Boyle, Lowery, & Mueller, 2012, p. 14). In the re-issued *SPPV* of 1949, the field solidified its position on the importance of high student engagement, noting "the student is thought of as a responsible participant in his own development and not as a passive recipient of an imprinted economic, political, or religious doctrine, or vocational skill" (NASPA, 1989, p. 22). These statements ring with Deweyan roots of active, experiential learning, and were included to directly challenge dominant classroom pedagogical practices.

The field of student affairs has consistently challenged academic curricular offerings and pedagogical practices. Recognizing that colleges and universities had greatly narrowed the college experience to focus on academic discipline and vocation, the field complicated the conversation of how a strict classroom-based approach to learning could really aid students and society:

The college or university which accepts these broad responsibilities for aiding in the optimum development of the individual in his relations to society will need to evaluate carefully and periodically its curricular offerings, its methods of instruction, and all other resources for assisting the individual to reach his personal goals (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 1989, p. 26).

Here, the field of student affairs is challenging the shortfalls of an academic curriculum that became too narrowly focused on academic discipline and vocation. Further, student affairs educators in the field were pressing colleges and universities to remember that a college education was meant for more than vocation, but for service to society, democracy, and most importantly, the maximization of individual development and goal achievement.

Nowhere does this direct challenge to the academic curriculum of colleges and universities become more apparent than in Brown's (1972) seminal statement *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education: A Return to the Academy.* Brown squarely highlighted the dilemma of a narrowly defined academic, vocationally focused college curriculum, stating "that educational institutions of all kinds and at all levels must ask themselves again whether they exist for the sake of training students or educating them" (Brown, 1972, p. 47). Brown's critique of colleges falls within his assessment that colleges have become training grounds, losing their educational focus. In his analysis, "few current curriculums are designed to help students grow as persons" (p. 44), specifically in regard to the enhancement of personal values. True to the focus of the field, Brown (1972) also criticized the academic curriculum for failing to help students "improve the effectiveness in interpersonal relationships" (p. 44) or gain "a sense of playful exploration in the arts, or a realistic awareness of sexuality" (p.

44). Failure of the academic disciplines to address topics of group dynamics, personal values, and social identities, for Brown, was failure on the part of colleges to provide true holistic education to students.

Brown's (1972) solution to this problem was two-fold: eradicate the co-curricular nature of student affairs work and engage faculty in viewing education as a holistic process. Boldly stating that "it is time now for student development functions to become curricular – with no prefix added" (Brown, 1972, p. 42), he advocated constructing an entire series of academic courses focusing on student's personal, social, and psychosocial development:

Could practicum experiences in human relations or developing an awareness of self, participation in sensitivity sessions, involvement in leadership and decision-making processes be justifiably taken for credit? One of the major arguments of this monograph is that they can and should be. (Brown, 1972, p. 40).

This curriculum would impact students both affectively and cognitively, while also ushering in a new focus on holistic learning.

Brown was cognizant that the training model of education had disrupted a holistic learning experience for college students, and he was careful to indict both faculty and student affairs professionals for the disconnected educational experience of students:

It is time for student personnel workers to recognize that they too have been dealing with only a part of the student, and it is no more valid for them to expect effectiveness in dealing with the student's development, independent of his academic life, than it is for the professor to think a student's personal self does not affect his academic growth. (Brown, 1972, p. 38)

The creation of a curriculum focused on the developmental needs of students traditionally confined to student affairs work would alleviate this disconnected experience, ultimately leading to holistic education, rather than just vocational training. Brown (1972) envisioned student development concepts "permeating the academic offerings" (p. 42). Partnerships between faculty and student affairs staff could "expand the typical concerns of the academician to include process as well as content . . . competency attainment as well as knowledge learned" (Brown, 1972, p. 42). Ultimately, Brown's challenge in *A Return to the Academy* focused on the bifurcated learning experience of college students (Evans & Reason, 2001). The curriculum of the academy had devolved into training experiences, not focused on true holistic learning, but solely on preparation for post-baccalaureate vocation. His solution of eradicating this disconnect through the creation of curricular offerings and partnerships between student affairs staff and faculty was a radical departure from the previous statements in the field of student affairs, and directly challenged the academic disciplines and structuring of curriculum in the academy (Evans & Reason, 2001).

Brown's attempt at eradicating the divide in the collegiate learning experience, while overhauling the curriculum, was never fully realized. In 1989, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) re-issued the 1937 and 1949 statements on Student Personnel, showing continued resistance to the failures of traditional academically focused college curricula. The reissuing of these statements reaffirmed the educational responsibilities of student affairs educators on contemporary college campuses, including helping students "explore

and clarify values" (NASPA, 1989, p. 17), helping students "understand and appreciate racial, ethnic, gender, and other differences" (NASPA, 1989, p. 17), and designing "opportunities for leadership development" (NASPA, 1989, p. 17). These expectations of student affairs educators, embedded within a document giving primacy to the academic experience, illustrates that student affairs educators were continuing to challenge the curricular structures of the university. Though academic learning was viewed as a primary focus of the undergraduate experience, clearly there are gaps in student learning that must be addressed, including a focus on values, appreciation of difference, and the understanding of leadership.

# **Student Learning: A Contemporary Challenge**

In the 1990's, the field of student affairs explicitly began to adopt the language of student learning in a continuing attempt to challenge the academic curricular offerings of the university. Beginning with the *Student Learning Imperative* in 1994, the field recognized that the bifurcated nature of the academy was not to be dissolved, though the division of "activities into 'academic affairs' and 'student affairs' . . . has little relevance to post-college life" (ACPA & NASPA, 1994, Purpose section, para. 2). The contemporary challenge for the field of student affairs became ensuring impactful student learning occurred in out-of-classroom experiences, while also providing the spaces for engagement with ideas not available or explored in the academic curriculum. The *Student Learning Imperative* continued to stress that "learning and personal development are cumulative, mutually shaping processes that occur over an extended period of time in many different settings," (ACPA & NASPA, 1994, Section 3, para. 1) while also recognizing that a new discourse needed to arise around transformative learning.

This discourse on student learning reached its apex in 2004 with the publication of *Learning Reconsidered*. Here, the field once again asserted its position that "all the resources of the campus must be brought to bear on the student's learning process and learning must be reconsidered" (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 11). The document rearticulated a view that bifurcated learning experiences had dominated the college landscape for well over a century:

Seeing students as their component parts (mind, body, spirit), rather than as an integrated whole, supported the emergence of fragmented college systems and structures – academic affairs to cultivate the intellect, and student affairs to tend the body, emotions, and spirit. (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 5)

Finally, *Learning Reconsidered* continued a dialogue on the shortfalls of the traditional academic curriculum, stating that "the curriculum, while structured around conventional categories that are meaningful to the academy, does not necessarily address issues that matter to students in relation to their own intentional learning needs, learning styles, or interests" (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 9). Though the field of student affairs had consistently articulated the argument that the academic curriculum failed to meet the full educational needs of students, the shift in focus to student learning was a halcyon call to action for professionals in the field to break away from the frustrating discourse of bifurcation in the academy.

The focus on student learning suggested that student affairs itself had a curricular structure, and ensuring that true dynamic student learning was occurring in this curriculum was as important as challenging the shortfalls of the academic curriculum. Further, focusing on

student learning forced recognition within the field that helping students reflect on academic and non-academic learning would assist in transforming higher education. The result for students would be "the evolution of multidimensional identity, including but not limited to cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual development" (ACPA & NASPA, 2004, p. 10).

Not surprisingly, practitioners extended the conversation on ensuring impactful learning in the student affairs curriculum with the publication of *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006). This document, while continuing to articulate a position that learning occurs across all environments in the academy, focused almost exclusively on helping practitioners in the field of student affairs think through their own understanding of learning as a holistic, integrated, experiential, and process-oriented activity. Ensuring transformative learning was occurring in the curricular offerings of traditional student affairs environments became important, and *Learning Reconsidered 2* challenged practitioners to develop learning outcomes, enhance experiential learning, and consistently challenge their own pedagogical approaches to work with students in the academy.

#### The Student Affairs Curriculum

It is important to move beyond the theoretical writing and discourse in the field of student affairs and explicate some explicit demonstrations of student affairs curricula that have challenged the academic curriculum of the university. One area where this work is most prevalent is in the recognition of various student social identities. Many campuses fail to offer the academic courses, majors, or minors that allow students to explore, understand, and integrate their socio-cultural identity. The result has been formation of women's centers, multicultural centers, international student centers, racial and ethnic centers, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender centers (Worley & Wells-Dolan, 2012). While many argue that the presence of such resources on campus are rooted in "enhancing feelings of membership within the campus community" (Worley & Wells-Dolan, 2012, p. 49) for minority students, the broader focus of such environments is to challenge the shortfalls of an academic curriculum that fails to engage many students, faculty, or staff in discussions about the importance of socio-cultural identity. Many of these campus resources sponsor educational workshops, prominent speakers, or advocate for greater inclusion of socio-cultural issues in the academic curriculum.

The proliferation of First-Year, Sophomore-Year, and Senior experience capstone courses provides another example of how student affairs challenges the academic curriculum of the university. It is in these classes that Brown's (1972) desire to create a fully integrated academic and student development course is most aptly realized. The development of First-Year Experience courses began at the University of South Carolina in 1974 (Watts, 1999), not long after Brown published his seminal work *A Return to the Academy*. Since that time, First-Year Experience courses have evolved and expanded, and are now included on 85% of campuses nationwide (Keup & Padgett, 2010). While these courses vary in their length, design, and outcomes, most focus on ensuring that student academic and social needs are being addressed in the transition to college. Further, such courses, often offered for credit, can include common reading programs, writing assignments, reflective activities, teambuilding experiences, and often cover topics not included elsewhere in the academic curriculum.

Contemporaneously, student affairs professionals continue to challenge the lack of academic focus on environmental and sustainability issues. In 2008, ACPA – College Student

Educators International published *Toward a Sustainable future: The Role of Student Affairs in Creating Healthy Environments, Social Justice, and Strong Economies.* This document recognized that most campuses are not preparing students for engagement with discourses of sustainability. This challenge to our academic institutions expanded the understanding of sustainability beyond the confines of strict environmental focus. Continuing a long tradition of advocating for social justice and human rights, this document framed the conversation of sustainability around issues of economic oppression and the impact of both environmental and economic degradation on issues of human equality and social justice. Such focus from the field of student affairs challenges the lack of examination regarding such topics and intersections in the traditional academic classroom.

Though there are countless other examples of how student affairs continues to challenge the strict academic structures of the university, these three examples demonstrate the continued persistence of student affairs educators to complicate the conversations on the academic curriculum at colleges and universities. This work of challenge and interruption has always been a foundational aspect of student affairs work. What began as a desire to integrate and create a holistic learning experience for students has evolved in contemporary times to a focus on ensuring transformative student learning across a variety of contexts through engagement with topics not often examined or discussed in traditional academic classrooms.

# Conclusion

2012 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> publication anniversary of The Student Personnel Point of View, a foundational document from the American Council on Education credited with solidifying the purpose, scope, philosophy, and function of student affairs work on college campuses. Since the field's inception, student affairs educators have focused on experiential learning, development of the "whole" student, attention to environmental learning conditions, focus on individual learners, and a commitment to democratic values as necessary components of the college experience. These philosophical beliefs can be traced through a series of historic documents, each developed and produced by professionals responding to shifts in the higher education landscape, with almost seamless and predictable regularity, over the past seven decades. From the foundational Student Personnel Point of View to the most recent Learning Reconsidered (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), these documents have guided the profession of student affairs by consistently articulating guiding values, principles, and methods of good practice (Barber & Bureau, 2012). While many view these documents as simple re-articulations of standard practices and beliefs, meant only for consumption by individuals occupying the arenas of operation traditionally known as student affairs, their scope and purpose is far greater, particularly in relation to challenging the strict academic focus of the college student experience.

Though often overlooked, much of the challenge and resistance that student affairs has presented to the academy came in the form of critiquing the shortfalls of the traditional academic curriculum. Certainly the field has and continues to discredit the bifurcated, disjointed learning experience evident in the modern academy. Much of this has come in the form of direct challenges to the academic curriculum and the strict academic disciplinary structuring of the university. The field's shift to a focus on student learning in the past two decades recognized that such strict structuring might not be eradicated, but that focus must remain on creating seamless, whole learning for students while continuing to challenge the discourses and provide spaces for learning not offered in the traditional academic classroom.

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