

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AT CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

The purpose of these *Principles* is to provide a framework for student affairs professionals who work at Catholic colleges and universities that may serve as a basis for reflection and conversation, planning, staff development, and assessment. These *Principles* articulate specific expectations, recognizing that Catholic colleges and universities are a diverse set of institutions that will implement these ideals in various ways.

Preamble

Student learning and development are complex, multifaceted functions at any institution and are a shared responsibility among many stakeholders. Students' families, their church communities, the faculty, professional staff, and other members of the university community all combine to support student growth and development. Student affairs professionals play a unique role by enriching student learning and integrating the various aspects of college experience.

From its very beginning to the present, our profession consistently has acknowledged the primacy of the institution's mission in guiding the practice of student affairs on campus. At faith-based colleges and universities, student affairs professionals have the opportunity and responsibility to help students integrate the development and expression of their faith into their larger learning experiences.

Catholic colleges and universities were founded to provide quality higher education within the tradition of their Catholic identity. Although contemporary Catholic colleges and universities are often diverse communities that are composed of Catholics, persons of other faiths, and persons with no religious affiliation, Catholicism forms the defining religious culture. Student affairs professionals who work at Catholic institutions are asked to model the values consistent with this religious tradition, and to build policies, services, and programs supportive of the institution's mission.

Student affairs professionals at Catholic institutions are both guided by generally-accepted principles of student affairs practice and called to bring the Catholic mission to life in their work, often within the context of the charism of the institution's founding congregation. We acknowledge and embrace the creative tension inherent in our role, especially when there are issues with different interpretations of Catholic teaching. We also acknowledge the good work of ACPA and NASPA in developing the *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (1997) and other documents that articulate the profession's standards and values. These *Principles* are meant to build upon that foundation, and provide guidance to practitioners at Catholic colleges and universities.

Good practice for student affairs at Catholic colleges and universities...

1. Welcomes all students into a vibrant campus community that celebrates God's love for all.

Student affairs professionals at Catholic colleges and universities are committed to creating inclusive, welcoming campus environments in which the members celebrate the diversity of all in both faith and culture. Their works, actions, and programs reflect respect, justice, collaboration, and dialogue.

2. Grounds policies, practices, and decisions in the teachings and living tradition of the Church. Builds and prepares the student affairs staff to make informed contributions to the Catholic mission of the institution.

In addition to relevant civil law and professional standards of practice and ethics, scripture, tradition, philosophical reflection, and the sustained experience of the Christian community all help to guide policy-formation and decision-making in Catholic institutions. Catholic theology continues to be refined, developed, and applied to contemporary circumstances.

As questions arise within the institution about the applicability of official Catholic teaching, it is important that student affairs professionals become familiar with such teaching, consulting other colleagues, Church or pastoral leaders, and theological specialists as appropriate. Senior leaders of student affairs divisions should make a commitment to hire a sufficient cohort of members who are familiar with Catholic teaching, and to provide professional development for all their employees on such matters.

3. Enriches student integration of faith and reason through the provision of co-curricular learning opportunities.

The Catholic tradition has always valued and engaged in dialogue about the interconnection and integration of faith and reason. This dialogue and integration is a legitimate and significant part of Catholic higher education. Catholic colleges and universities foster the development of the whole person. In addition to rigorous intellectual development, there is particular emphasis on a student's faith and spiritual development.

In collaboration with academic colleagues, student affairs professionals provide educational opportunities and learning experiences outside the classroom that complement the learning in the classroom, such as living-learning residential communities, volunteer service activities, and service-learning opportunities. Catholic colleges and universities provide opportunities for students to develop a habit of reflection and to value prayer in bringing both faith and reason to the discernment process of how to live out their learning experiences and the values of Catholic higher education in their personal and professional lives. Catholic colleges and universities also

provide opportunities for intellectually-informed and robust conversations on important issues of faith and culture, including applying relevant Catholic teaching to these issues.

4. Creates opportunities for students to experience, reflect, and act from a commitment to justice, mercy, and compassion, and in light of Catholic social teaching to develop respect and responsibility for all, especially those most in need.

Because the framework of the Catholic social tradition is vital to the work of student affairs professionals in Catholic institutions, it is important for these professionals to become familiar with the tradition and to incorporate it into learning opportunities for students. Central to this work is a deepening awareness of injustice in the local, national, and global arenas that can become more grounded through creative partnering with diverse, underserved communities. Ample opportunities for action and reflection will help all to grow, individually and collectively, in their knowledge and practice of this rich tradition, thereby contributing to the common good and building a more human and just world.

5. Challenges students to high standards of personal behavior and responsibility through the formation of character and virtues.

Students' personal choices around issues of alcohol or drug use, the treatment of others, sexual behavior, and other moral and health related issues can and should be informed by Church teaching. While there are tensions between such teachings and current social mores, these differences serve as powerful teaching opportunities. Student affairs professionals in Catholic colleges and universities should partner with Church or pastoral leaders to provide ongoing opportunities for conversation and other programs to support students in making appropriate choices that show respect for self and others.

6. Invites and accompanies students into the life of the Catholic Church through prayer, liturgy, sacraments and spiritual direction.

Catholic colleges and universities assist all students to develop an active and meaningful relationship with God. This is accomplished through such activities as traditional and contemporary prayer opportunities, small faith sharing groups, retreats, spiritual direction, and (upon request) RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults] instruction. In addition, liturgical and sacramental opportunities are scheduled on a regular basis for Catholic students. Each student's personal relationship with God can be further deepened by application of the charisms and spiritual practices of the institution's founding religious order, where applicable.

In many Catholic institutions the campus ministry staff is part of the student affairs division. In other Catholic institutions student affairs professionals collaborate with members of the campus ministry staff. In welcoming students to the salvific richness of Jesus Christ, student affairs professionals have a responsibility to understand and articulate the Catholic faith and to support and work with campus ministers to provide pastoral care and leadership to students seeking spiritual growth.

7. Seeks dialogue among religious traditions and with contemporary culture to clarify beliefs and fosters mutual understanding in the midst of tensions and ambiguities.

Student affairs professionals who work in the Catholic tradition and serve in institutions of higher learning have a twofold call: to articulate a compelling truth as we understand it and to search for an informed truth as we explore it. While the first is supported by the rich heritage and reflection of a faith community, the second entails openness to other traditions and experiences. Educational institutions thrive on respectful debate. Inherent differences of view and consequent uncertainties and tensions are vital to the learning mission of colleges and universities. Thus student affairs professionals serving in them honor other traditions and experiences and invite them into dialogue for purposes of exploration and insight.

8. Assists students in discerning and responding to their vocations, understanding potential professional contributions, and choosing particular career directions.

Christians believe that their lifework is accomplished in partnership with the God who gave us life and talents. Student affairs professionals often guide students in their discernment of life-choices. At Catholic colleges and universities, these privileged conversations can help to integrate students' search for meaning and purpose, bringing together their gifts, ambitions, and hopes with the world's needs. This discernment process seeks to equip students to balance and integrate professional, personal, and relational commitments.

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