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An Undergraduate Experience in a Graduate Class

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I would like to start this project with an explanation of why I felt so passionate about my experience in a graduate course. Ever since my first year at Bowling Green State University, I have been eager to get involved in everything I could. My involvement started within my resident hall, as a member of the Harshman Chapman-Dunbar Hall Council. My second year, I took on a larger role as the Vice President of Hall Council Affairs and Recognition. This position was what first introduced me to the world of Student Affairs. I worked directly with a first-year graduate student in Bowling Green's College Student Personnel program. This student was a true Student Affairs professional; she was always willing to be there for me, to help me no matter what I needed, and to offer her support and encouragement. She was a fantastic mentor and role model throughout my college experience. This was the mentor who first sparked my interest in the profession of student affairs. During the spring semester of my second year, I had the privilege of being hired as a Resident Advisor in Centennial Hall. I immediately fell in love with the role of Resident Advisor. I felt that I was giving back to my first year students and playing the same role that my mentor played for me. It gave me such joy and kept me motivated every time one of my residents came to me for help.

In my third year, I returned as a Resident Advisor to Centennial Hall under the supervision of Steve Syoen, the full time hall director. If I had to point to one single person who shaped my college experience, it would be Steve. During that year, I developed as a student leader and as a Resident Advisor. I began to take on more responsibilities and be shaped as a caring leader. I also began to understand and appreciate diversity and its impact on my life. I was falling in love with the college atmosphere and wanted to experience it more. I applied and was hired as a Campus Tour Guide by the Office of

Admissions during the spring of my third year. During that same semester, I was initiated into the Alpha Psi Chapter of Alpha Omicron Pi, a social Panhellenic Fraternity. The Panhellenic community, or Greek Life, is a very active organization at Bowling Green State University, consisting of 12 chapters on campus. The two experiences of joining Fraternity and Sorority Life and recruiting for the university I loved pushed me more and more towards Student Affairs and the idea of working with college students for the rest of my life.

The summer between my third and fourth years at Bowling Green State University, I spent time working as a campus tour guide. It was then that I discovered that Student Affairs encompassed more than Residence Life. I learned that it was involved with all of the parts of my experience that I had come to love. That summer I also began to question if current major was right and if I truly wanted to continue with that degree. I spent many hours talking to Steve about what my options in Student Affairs and where and what I could do to learn more about the professional field. Steve suggested I speak with the Higher Education Department at Bowling Green State University. I took his advice and spoke with Dr. Maureen Wilson, Associate Professor and Chair of the Higher Education and Student Affairs program. I asked her anything and everything under the sun about student affairs. It was Dr. Wilson who suggested I applied to enroll in the CSP 6010: Foundations and Functions of College Student Personnel in the fall of my senior year. This opportunity was something that I never expected and I took it and never looked back. I began to prepare all summer for the experience that could potentially change my life.

Why I Chose CSP 6010 for My Honors Project

There are a few reasons why I chose this as my honors project. Student Affairs is typically not a well-known profession until you get involved in the colligate experience. I

wanted to expose this profession to honors students, who are typically more involved on campus than other students. The object of this project is to increase awareness of the profession among college students and give students a resource to use during their graduate school search and to reflect on my own experience. Writing about the subject of Student Affairs and my experience in this field also is the perfect opportunity to increase my knowledge of the profession and to reflect on my class experience.

Overview of Student Affairs: Functional Areas

The profession of Student Affairs has multiple areas and functions that you can work in after completing a Master's Program. To better understand student affairs, I am going to break down the different functional areas that a student affairs professional could work in. There are 15 Functional Areas that we covered during my graduate class experience. These will be overviewed in this paper to give a better understanding of the profession. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are more functional areas in student affairs than only these 15. The 15 Functional Areas were part of a continuous class assignment where each student researched and presented on a different functional area. These areas were chosen based on the *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education* and they are the most frequently associated with Student Affairs.

Campus Activities is one of the first functional areas that we covered during my graduate course. Campus Activities is also a functional area that undergraduates are typically familiar with. The mission of Campus Activities Programs "must be appropriate to the institution's student populations" (CAS Standards, 2012). The Office of Campus Activities combines the missions of the student organizations to "educate, develop or

entertain...the campus community” (CAS Standards, 2012). Overall, the Campus Activities programs are there to benefit the students and the student organizations.

Academic Advising is the next functional area to look at. All students know about academic advising, however they do not typically pair them with Student Affairs. The goal of Academic Advising is to help students set and pursue long-term goals and to takes steps to begin to job search or help prepare to go into a graduate degree. The academic advisor plays a major role in first-year students’ college experience and can continue that positive impact throughout their college career. Often the first year is when the student needs the most guidance, however a student’s academic advisor can become an important mentor in their collegiate experience.

Commuter and Off-Campus Living Programs is a functional area that undergraduate students do not know about until they move off campus and realize they still need resources. The mission of Commuter and Off-Campus Living Programs is to “ensure that all students have equitable access to institutional services” (CAS Standards, 2012). These programs frequently help students with finding transportation, managing new life roles, creating a new support system, and maintaining their sense of belonging within the campus community.

The Career Center is a campus resource that many undergraduate students know about and frequently take advantage of their resources. The mission of the Career Center is to “assist students...in developing, evaluating, and implementing career, education, and employment plans” (CAS Standards, 2012). The Career Services professionals work to promote student learning that is useful to their career goals. This is an office that upper-class students typically use to find internships, co-ops, or careers after graduation.

Disability Resources and Services is another resource that undergraduate students do not associate with Student Affairs, however it is an extremely important service. The mission of Disability Resources and Services is to “provide leadership and facilitate equal access to all institutional opportunities for disabled students” (CAS Standards, 2012). The Disability Resources and Services Center works with a variety of students across campus to ensure their needs are fully met while at their institution.

A very common department within Student Affairs is Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs. The mission of Fraternity and Sorority Programs at the colligate level is to “promote the learning and development of students who affiliate with fraternities and sororities” (CAS Standards, 2012). Fraternity and Sorority Programs is a very important part of the colligate experience for those who are affiliated with Fraternity or Sorority Life. The office will work with organizations and their members, the community within the university, and the national organization’s staff, and administrators.

International Student Programs and Services is another functional area that is often overlooked by the traditional undergraduate student, however it is a very important area. There are international students in most of the courses offered to undergraduates. Someone involved in Student Affairs should be aware of the resources available for students. The goals of the International Student Programs and Services are to “provide support and assistance necessary for international students to achieve their educational goals” (CAS Standards, 2012). Without this functional area, the institution would not have the same standard of excellence for diversity that many institutions pride themselves on. The International Student Programs and Services play an important role in any international student’s life and is a necessary service for their success.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs and Services is a newer office on many college campus, but they are an extremely important aspect of student services. Their mission is to promote academic and personal growth of all LGBT and questioning students, advance access and equity to LGBT communities, and to offer programs to educate the campus about sexual orientation and gender identity expression (CAS Standards, 2012).

The Housing and Residential Life Programs are one of the most well known offices on campus and are most often associated with Student Affairs. Many student affairs professionals get their start as a Resident Advisor or in a similar position. The Housing and Residential Life Programs goals are intended to create a living environment that promotes learning and development and that provides reasonably priced living facilities (CAS Standards, 2012).

Another important resource for campus students is the Multicultural Student Programs and Services. The mission of this office is to “promote academic and personal growth of traditionally underserved students, work with the entire campus to create an institutional and community climate of justice, and to promote access and equity in higher education” (CAS Standards, 2012). This office works to promote diversity in all aspects of campus life and works closely with other functional areas.

Orientation Programs, another office that is often viewed as part of Student Affairs, can be another gateway for undergraduates who may become interested in student affairs. The mission of orientation programs is to “facilitate the transition of new students into the institution” (CAS Standards, 2012). Orientation is a great way for first-year students to first experience what student affairs can do for them.

Another office is Parent and Family Programs. This office has the mission to “build collaboration between parents and families and the institution of the common goals of student learning, development, and success” (CAS Standards, 2012). Programming for Parent and Family Programs is often taken on by a collaboration of several different offices to work with events such as Family Weekend, Sibs n Kids Weekend, or Homecoming. These are all events coordinated by this office to help encourage the parents and families of students to come on campus and be involved with campus life. This office is key for outreach and the spread of information to student’s families.

Another important office on campus is the Veterans and Military Programs and Services. Even though it serves a very select group of students, it is a vital resource. The mission of this office is to provide programs and services for student veterans, military service members, and their family members. This office also works closely with Registration and Records to provide veteran benefits to the students in need. This is typically an office that is not well known on campus for undergraduates unless they are in need of the services.

Finally, Student Conduct Programs is a common office on many campuses. They coordinate with several different offices and undergraduate students typically have heard of this office. The mission of this office is to develop and enforce standards of conduct and to create an educational environment to foster students’ learning and development. These programs and services aid students in learning and development of personal accountability and responsibility.

Reflection of CSP 6010

My initial response to the graduate class was extremely different than what my final impression was. I was very intimidated at first, knowing that these would be graduate students and that the level of the class expectations would be much higher than anything I had ever experienced. Before the fall semester began, I spoke with Dr. Michael Coomes who would be teaching the class. After our introduction, I became a little more relaxed about the experience. He assured me that the class would go smoothly and that the semester would be an exciting one. The first day was a nerve wracking one. I knew that I would be held to a higher standard than your typical undergraduate course. Not only did I want to make a good first impression on the class but I also wanted to be taken seriously. I was nervous that because I was an undergraduate student in a class full of graduate students that I would not be included or would be looked down on. I quickly learned that I didn't need to worry about that. The first day of class was one to remember. Everyone accepted me as a person and as a student who was on his or her level, even though some of them were my supervisors. This made for an interesting experience. I knew that I would be expected to still act like a mentee in roles outside of the course, but I was striving to be an equal within the course. The only time where things became awkward was when the conversation would turn slightly less professional than usual, however I really enjoyed seeing a different side of my supervisors. This helped me understand that life as a graduate student is serious, but there is still time to enjoy your own personal life.

Class Environment

CSP 6010 was like no other class I had experienced. The students typically dressed up, as they were coming from their internships and needed to be professional. It was also much more of a discussion based class than what I expected. Graduate level courses at

Bowling Green State University are only one day a week for several hours, instead of the typical pattern of three class meetings a week. Getting used to this was one of the biggest adjustments I had to make as a student. Each class started with announcements from the students or professor. Students would share things that their internship was doing that week or events occurring within the College Student Personal program. Then starting in the third week of class, we began to report on the 15 Functional Areas discussed above. Each student would have a different functional area and they would report to the class about their research. This was a way for the students to learn more about the different areas that they did not have an internship in. After this, Dr. Coomes would begin his lecture for the day. As the topic for this class was Foundations and Functions of College Student Personnel, we started with how the profession of Student Affairs began. We went through journal articles and readings on the history of the profession for the first portion of the class. Then we dove into issues surrounding student affairs, such as the assumptions about the profession, understanding the administration of Student Affairs, and the legal and ethical foundations of the profession. The legal and ethical foundations were the most interesting to discuss. It covered moral decisions, the five ethical principles, and how student affairs professionals could combat their own bias. We discussed how the different branches of Student Affairs all fit together in the puzzle and the hierarchy of the Division of Student Affairs when the administration topic was brought up. Finally, the assumptions of the profession cleared the air on many of the aspects of the job I was unfamiliar with.

Overall, the class was a combination of relaxed and professional. We could refer to our professor by his first name, ask questions during the lectures, and bring up discussion

points we found relevant. There was also a 15-minute break each class to give the students a chance to stretch or get food.

Assignments and Feedback

The assignments for CSP 6010 were not as complicated as I expected, but they were time consuming and intense. The course required that students complete two issue papers (written papers about a controversial topic), an interview of a faculty member about their perspective of Student Affairs (simply the interview and a paper turned in), your Functional Area report (an oral report about the Functional Area you were assigned), a "Site Team" report (an oral report for the class about a different university that the group visited), and midterm and final examinations. The issue papers were research each student did on an issue in student affairs, such as policies the campus enforces or current issues like health and fitness. The purpose of these papers was to prepare student affairs professionals to present their argument clearly on a topic and to develop a professional writing style. The faculty paper was one of my favorite assignments during the course. The object of this paper was to speak with a faculty member at Bowling Green State University and to learn about their roles and to create a relationship with them. Often times, faculty members and student affairs professionals do not understand each other's perspectives or roles. By completing this assignment, the students and faculty members were better able to understand each other's roles. The functional area report was also an interesting one, simply because each student was able to learn more about the different areas of student affairs and what they could do after graduation. This consisted of an interview with a staff member in the department you were assigned and a handout for the class about the functional area.

The largest of the three assignments were the Site Team Presentation, the midterm, and the final. The Site Team Presentation was by far the most complicated of the assignments. It consisted of dividing the class into three groups and each group was assigned a different type of higher education. The three types were a private university, a historically black university, and a community college. The teams then had to go on a campus visit and speak to student affairs professionals at that institution. Each group also chose a functional area to research within that institution. A 45-minute class presentation was then given about the functional area and the campus visit and a paper was turned in to Dr. Coomes about the research that was done. The midterm and final were both papers, written on different subjects discussed in class. The midterm was an in class paper about the history of student affairs, while the final was a take home assignment.

Feedback was a very important part of Dr. Coomes' teaching style and the class as a whole. We often had opportunities to rewrite papers or to ask questions before turning assignments in. The grading style was extremely fair and was clearly outlined to the class. Each assignment would be clearly described and questions were also welcome at any time. Especially as an undergraduate student, I felt the support from Dr. Coomes and the rest of the department while going through the class.

Group Work Activities

Many of the assignments were not group work, however the importance of group work was not lost in CSP 6010. The major assignment that we worked on as a team was the Site Visit Presentation. This project was very focused on how to work best with each other and the success of the whole group. This is a very important aspect of the Student Affairs career and CSP 6010 helped develop the student's skills for group work.

We would also do some group work in class regarding the issue papers. Before a paper was due, the class would switch papers and edit a peer's paper. After the edit, the groups that switched would talk to each other and walk through the paper. Small group work such as this helped build the relationships in the class and reinforce the team mentality.

What I Learned

CSP 6010 taught me more than I thought was possible, not just about the profession but about myself as well. The field of student affairs is so diverse and different, between different focus areas and styles at different universities that this course only scratched the surface of what there is to learn. Even though I had been involved in the student affairs life for all four years of my collegiate experience, I never knew how in depth the profession truly was. The part that intrigued me the most was the history of student affairs. During the course, we walked through the history of the profession beginning with the colonial period of United States history all the way to the present time. We learned about the difference that the American universities made on the world of student affairs. What was also interesting to me was how European universities have a completely different view of student affairs. I also learned about the relationships between student affairs professionals and faculty members. This was an aspect that I never would have known about as just a student. I also really enjoyed learning about the ethics and legal foundations of the profession. Over the 16 weeks of the course, I learned more than I thought was possible.

What I Learned About Myself

Taking a graduate class as an undergraduate student taught me much more about myself than I ever expected. The relationships I formed with the CSP program graduates in

my first three years at Bowling Green State University where much different than the relationships I formed during the course. In this course, I was looked at as an equal, even though I was an undergraduate student. I also learned more about my personal values and ideas and how they differed from the student affairs prospective. Values are a very important part of the field and a professional in this field must recognize how their values align with their coworkers, students, and others who they work with. I was continually encouraged to learn more about my personal values and the values that most student affairs professionals hold. I learned what it was like to have my values challenged and how to handle situations like that in a professional manner.

I was also challenged through out this course to really know what I wanted to do for a career and if the student affairs professional was the right fit for me. Over the 16 weeks of this course, I learned how to work with others with different backgrounds than myself. I was put into a very different environment than what I was used to and had to learn how to adapt to a new set of standards. Even though I am not sure that my future career will be within student affairs, this course developed me more than what I thought was possible.

Comparison of Graduate Class and Undergraduate Classes

To begin with, I knew the level of expectations would be higher for a graduate course than what I was used to. I knew the expectation to look and act professional would be held to a higher standard than other courses I had taken. The workload was also at a higher level than other courses, much more was expected of the students and the level at which it was done was to be much more professional than other courses. The assigned readings were expected to be done because the conversation in class would be centered on each reading. The exams were also at a much more intense than other courses. The main

difference with assignments and exams was that papers were to be written in APA format, something I had never used before. This was one of the biggest challenges for me to overcome. All of the writing courses and assignments previous to this course were in MLA and it was defiantly hard to adjust and learn a new style.

There were similarities between this course and undergraduate courses as well. There were still all your typical aspects of a class, a syllabus, exams, and assignments. I also felt the support from Dr. Coomes that I had become used to receiving from Bowling Green State University's professors. Office hours were always a productive and useful aspect of this course as well. Overall, even though there were much higher expectations, the course had many of the same characteristics of other courses.

Expectations of a Graduate Course

As mentioned before, there were much higher expectations in this course than I had ever experienced. The main reason behind this was that the graduate students were all para-professionals at the university. They were advisors to students and worked directly with the professionals in their functional area. This meant that often they were coming from their internship placement and were already dressed professionally. In most of my courses, students would be dressed in more comfortable clothes, such as sweats or t-shirts. The expectation was that the students in CSP 6010 would be dressed and act professionally. We were also expected to participate in the conversation of the class every day. This was a large part of this course and how we learned. We were also expected to use journal articles that came from an enhanced source as citations in our papers. We were given some good, reliable sources to explore and were expected to use articles similar to the articles we were assigned to read.

Conclusion

Overall, the profession of Student Affairs is a challenging, yet rewarding one. This course is a well-rounded introduction to what the profession is like and what a graduate student in the program can expect. I would encourage any undergraduate senior that is seriously interested in Student Affairs to search for opportunities such as this. Any student who is interested in serving others, working in a professional environment, and who enjoys the collegiate environment should consider this route. The four years I spent working as student staff in the student affairs world were very rewarding, challenging, and helped me grow and develop as a person.

The opportunity to take this graduate course and write an honors project based on that experience was once in a lifetime experience. The lessons I learned about myself are unforgettable, CSP 6010 taught me more than what the syllabus described. It taught me about my own values and perspectives on things, how to be a successful professional, and exactly what life as a graduate student would be like. Prior to this course, I considered myself a leader, a good student, and a role model for others. Now that I have taken CSP 6010 and reflected on my experience, I would consider myself to be well rounded and aware of the potential in the field. This was a challenge from the first day of my fall semester, but I proved that I could do what I put my mind to and am more confident in my abilities because of my experience. This opportunity and lesson's it taught me are something that will stay with me for a lifetime.

References

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2012). *CAS professional standards for higher education* (8th ed). Washington, D.C. Retrieved from:
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