

**An Approach (Emphasis) to Student Learning in Student Life at
Butler Community College**

Learning-Oriented Department of Student Life

As a department committed to student learning and personal development we exhibit the following characteristics:

1. THE STUDENT LIFE MISSION AND ALL AREAS WITHIN STUDENT LIFE COMPLEMENT THE INSTITUTIONAL MISSION, WITH THE ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BEING ONE OF THE PRIMARY GOALS OF STUDENT LIFE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Butler Student Life professionals take seriously their responsibilities for fostering learning and personal development. Their efforts are guided by a holistic philosophy of learning that is congruent with the institution's mission and clearly distinguish between the institution's commitment to process values and desired outcomes (e.g. student learning and personal development). If learning is one of the primary measures of institutional effectiveness (e.g. learning, goal attainment, economic growth, and civic responsibility – as outlined in Butler's General Overview) by which the quality of the Butler experience is determined, what and how much students learn also must be one of the criteria by which the value of student life is judged.

Questions and challenges:

- Do our area and department mission statements explicitly address student learning and personal development as the primary objectives of student life?
- Does Student Life staff understand and perform in ways congruent with this mission?

2. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES ARE DESIGNED AND DELIVERED TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT.

The department values those processes and conditions that are associated with desired student outcomes. The orientation of many student affairs professionals, and the activities in which they engage, emphasize certain aspects of learning and personal development (e.g., psycho-social) over others (e.g., knowledge application or intellectual development). For this reason, the department of Student Life must design programs, services, and setting that encourage student involvement in activities that have the potential to foster a wide range of learning and personal development outcomes (Learning PACT). Staff themselves should model such behaviors as collaboration and reflection that are likely to promote learning and participate in training and professional development opportunities that focus on personal and talent development strategies.

Questions and challenges:

- How can we as student life professionals be more intentional about promoting student learning while continuing to provide needed services to students and the institution?

- To what extent does our student life staff attend conferences or institutes and programs that address student development and the student learning imperative?

3. STUDENT LIFE PROFESSIONALS COLLABORATE WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS AND DEPARTMENTS TO PROMOTE STUDENT LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Too often, we allow our student services division to operate in silos due to the specialization of the work done in each of our areas; that is, not enough collaboration takes place. Our learning-oriented student life department recognizes that students benefit from many and varied experiences during college and that learning and personal development are cumulative, mutually shaping processes that occur over an extended period of time in many different settings. The more students are involved in a variety of activities inside and outside the classroom the more they gain developmentally demonstrated through Butler's Student Success Model. As student life professionals we will attempt to make "seamless" the college experience and what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected experiences by bridging organizational boundaries and forging collaborative partnerships with faculty and other departments to enhance student learning (as well as goal attainment, economic growth and civic responsibility). Examples of campus relationships that are potentially fruitful links include instructional connections (e.g., Student Connect, learning communities, service-learning), academic achievement centers (tutoring), student support services (e.g. Academic Advising, Counseling, Career Development) and faculty and staff development initiatives. Off-campus agencies (e.g., work, church, non-profits) also offer rich opportunities for learning (civic responsibility) through community service and service learning opportunities.

Questions and challenges:

- What are promising strategies for developing collaborative projects between student life and other campus and off campus agencies committed to enhancing student learning and personal development?
- How can student life professionals help students and faculty to intentionally connect academic work and out-of-class experiences?

4. THE STUDENT LIFE STAFF ARE EXPERTS ON STUDENTS, THEIR ENVIRONMENTS, AND TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES.

Student life staff should be familiar with student development theory and have a firm understanding of the college student and the college environment. Student life staff should know how students spend their time and whether students are using the institution's resources to their educational advantage. They share responsibility for initiating conversations--with students and other institutional agents--about how students could make more effective use of their time and institutional resources. They monitor whether student life and institutional policies and practices

enhance or detract from learning and personal development. More over, they integrate data about student performance from faculty and others with their own observations of students' experiences and disseminate this information to stakeholders.

Questions and challenges:

- How can student life staff obtain and synthesize information about student success?
- What must student life staff know and be able to do to assist faculty and staff in creating cooperative learning environments or experiences?

- What additional skills and knowledge are needed to successfully translate information about student behavior to faculty and others?

5. STUDENT LIFE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ARE BASED ON PROMISING PRACTICES FROM RESEARCH ON STUDENT LEARNING AND INSTITUTION-SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT DATA.

Certain conditions promote learning more than others. For example, learning and personal development are enhanced when students participate in groups organized around common intellectual, curricular, or career interests (e.g., study groups, student organizations, cluster floors – residence life - or learning communities). Student life professionals should adapt to their institutional setting promising practices from those fields that contribute to the body of knowledge about student leaning and personal development. They should routinely collect information to redesign student life policies and practices and rigorously evaluate their programs and services to determine the extent to which they contribute to the desired outcomes of the Butler experience and the Student Life experience (as outlined in the Student Life Experience Model). Toward this end, student life staff should participate in institution-wide efforts to assess student learning and personal development and periodically audit institutional environments to reinforce those factors that enhance, and eliminate those that inhibit, student involvement in educationally- purposeful activities. Beyond assessment data, which describes the current state of student success, we should strive to analyze the interdependence of key factors so we can identify critical improvements and predict their impact on student success (particularly in the areas of learning, goal attainment, economic growth, and civic responsibility).

Questions and challenges:

- Does our student life staff have the knowledge and expertise in learning theory and student development research needed to shape policies and practices that will lead to increased levels of student learning, personal development, and departmental and institutional effectiveness?

Adapted from “*The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs.*” ACPA, 1999.