



## **Kent Porterfield's Presidential Address**

ACPA 2014 Indianapolis Convention - Annual Business Meeting  
April 1, 2014

Jill, thank you for your kind words of introduction. It means so much to me that you were able to do this. You are truly a great friend, colleague and mentor. I owe a debt of gratitude to Jill and so many people who have inspired and supported me over the years. In particular, Greg Blimling, Liz Whitt, Larry Roper, Patty Perillo, and Myra Morgan all come to mind. I would also like to recognize Denise Ottinger, to whom I owe so much. Denise hired me in my first student affairs job almost 25 years ago, and then patiently mentored me in those early years as I labored to figure out what it meant to do this work the right way and be a contributing person in our field. Denise, you are a big reason why I am in this profession today, so thank you.

I would be remiss if I did not thank Saint Louis University's interim president William Kauffman for making it possible for me to do this. It is simply not possible to take on this role without the support of many, many people. Thanks to all the talented and dedicated faculty, staff and students at Saint Louis University, and particularly to those in Student Development and Athletics. I greatly appreciate your support and understanding when my service to ACPA takes me away from my work at the University. A special thanks to those from Saint Louis University attending the convention here in Indianapolis. I am grateful you are here.

To my ACPA friends and colleagues, I am humbled to have been presented with this tremendous opportunity to serve our association. So many of you have meant so much to me personally and professionally over the years, and I am proud to give back to an association that has given me far more than I could ever repay. I have learned from all of you, been inspired by you, worked alongside you, and experienced life's ups and downs with you. I have appreciated every minute of it. In many ways, I think ACPA is just one big, crazy, modern family. As many of you know, **I work at a Jesuit University, and the Jesuits are fond of the word "solidarity." I like that word. It reminds me of ACPA. I am thankful to be part of an association whose members so often and so strongly stand in solidarity for its values.**

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank Nicole, my best friend and partner in life. Nicole and I have been married for 22 years. She is, without question, the best person I know. She is my life compass, always steering me in the right direction and keeping me grounded and centered. Quite honestly, she makes me a better person. Nicole and my two daughters, Claire and Grace, wanted to be here, but school and other commitments require

them to be elsewhere. I know they are here in spirit, and I want to publicly thank them for their love and support. Because of them, I am truly blessed. They make it all work.

I have been a member of ACPA, serving in a variety of roles, for a very long time – well over two decades -- yet nothing I previously experienced really prepared me for this past year as ACPA's Vice President. I am grateful to Kathleen Kerr and Keith Humphrey for being my full-time tutors, to the International Office staff for helping me learn and fulfill my responsibilities, and to Governing Board and Assembly leaders for being such good colleagues and providing important perspectives on a host of issues. Thanks as well to my interns, Kaleigh Mrowka, Myrinda Grantham and Charles Stephens. I appreciate all that you do.

I've learned a lot this past year, and my travels have taken me to such places as Las Vegas, Nevada; Osage Beach, Missouri; Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; Louisville, Kentucky; Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida; Baltimore, Maryland; Washington, DC; Tampa, Florida; and of course, Indianapolis, Indiana. Everywhere I have been, I have marveled at the energy, intellect, commitment, and abilities of ACPA members with whom I've interacted. We may sometimes feel like we have too little time and too many challenges, but **I can tell you with a straight face that we do not lack talent or dedication in this association.**

One year ago, Kathleen Kerr stood on a stage similar to this one in Las Vegas, Nevada and talked about wisdom -- wisdom from 90 years of ACPA history -- and the importance of looking forward while we are celebrating our granite anniversary. Kathleen reminded us that granite provides a substantial foundation, and ACPA's foundation is deeply rooted in the association's core values. While our strategic plan pushes ACPA to be more flexible, innovative, and responsive to the changes that are happening in higher education and our field today, the plan is clearly rooted in the enduring values that have long defined our association. I will spend just a few minutes talking about our values, and in particular how they have impacted me personally and professionally, as well as how they will continue to guide ACPA's priorities into our future.

When I was a new professional, I sought a professional home. Full of questions and ideas, and with plenty of uncertainty and insecurity, I attended my first ACPA convention. I was hooked. Looking back, what first attracted me to ACPA was the association's clear commitment to research and scholarship. Research and scholarship has been a significant aspect of ACPA's heritage and it is our future as well. Today, we are seeking new ways to use the association's internal publications to disseminate knowledge and promulgate scholarship faster and more efficiently with members. We have expanded the number of issues for the Journal of College Student Development from 6 to 8 annually, and through our commissions, standing committees, state and international divisions, senior scholars, and other entity groups, we are promoting scholarship that generates new knowledge about social justice, global education, mental health, student learning and success, and many other important issues of our time.

As we look to the future, research and scholarship must continue to one of ACPA's most significant priorities, and we will need to continue to increase our level of support. This past year, the Governing Board has taken action to increase the number of International Office staff dedicated to supporting research and scholarship, and we recognize that additional investments are still needed. We will find a way to make those resource commitments.

When I was a new professional, I was nervous about attending programs presented by senior scholars and practitioners. I was intimidated about the prospect of engaging in dialogue with the thought leaders and giants of our field because I was certain I did not know enough and had little to contribute. I was new to the field and inexperienced, but to my surprise, the great educators and scholars in ACPA never made me feel that I did not belong at sessions with them, or that my questions were unsophisticated or inadequate, or that my viewpoints did not matter. Senior professionals were accessible to me as a new professional, and from my experiences in many different settings since, I know this is not something to take for granted. It simply does not happen in many other organizations. It has, however, always been part of our culture in ACPA, and it is something that we must appreciate, cherish, and continue to foster.

It was in ACPA that I was first challenged to contemplate, in a serious way, issues of privilege and oppression. My experiences and interactions with others in ACPA helped me examine my own privilege and begin to see issues and conditions in the universities where I have studied and worked through a lens of equity and inclusion. My own journey has not always been an easy one. It is not easy to face our own biases, or to recognize when our own actions and behaviors are contributing to inequity and exclusion. I know that personally and professionally I still have much to examine in my life, and I understand that striving to be a multiculturally competent person is a lifelong commitment. I can say without a doubt that my involvement in ACPA has affected my thinking and work as a senior student affairs officer on my campus.

Very few professional organizations have been as serious as ACPA about addressing issues of equity and inclusion. ACPA is absolutely a leader in higher education when it comes to advancing research, scholarship and professional practice in the arena of social justice. Recent advancements within ACPA include the development of a Bias Incident Response Protocol for the association; creation of standards for asking demographic questions on ACPA sponsored or endorsed surveys or forms; expansion of research and scholarship in ACPA publications focused on social justice, equity and inclusion; and the approval of an external relations protocol for Releasing Statements on Policy, Legislation and/or Judicial Actions. I envision a future for ACPA that builds on our legacy as the higher education association where scholars and practitioners go to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be more effective social justice educators, and that positions us to have a stronger voice on related public policy matters.

As a core value, ACPA remains committed to providing outstanding professional development for faculty and practitioners at all professional stages and across the wide range

of student affairs functions and issues. At this convention, a Credentialing Implementation Team 1.0 is sharing its work, which includes the development of an “e-registry” template built upon professional competencies. **myPROfolio** will be piloted in the coming months and rolled out to members later this year. Using myPROfolio, ACPA members will be able to engage their learning experiences through an interactive platform which incorporates not only written documents, but also advanced multimedia applications. Kathleen Kerr has already charged a Credentialing Implementation Team 2.0 with completing the next phase of work on this initiative. Among other efforts, the 2.0 team will review and analyze a global credentialing model to determine its fit for ACPA. This is indeed an exciting initiative.

ACPA has always valued the ideal of educating and developing the whole student. ACPA’s involvement with *The Student Learning Imperative* and *Learning Reconsidered* are just a couple of examples of this long standing commitment. We now live in the information age and advancements in web and wireless technology have created many new opportunities and challenges for higher education. As we endeavor to “reach and teach” our students, we need to increase our understanding of the impacts of rapidly expanding digital technology on higher education and our students. During my term as association president, I will be asking the Governing Board to consider strategies that advance digital technology applications in the field of student affairs, and in particular, to examine the use of digital technology as a pedagogical tool to foster student learning and engagement. This is an important strategic issue for our field, and ACPA is positioned well to provide leadership and direction.

Caring for the whole student also involves caring about issues of safety, health and human dignity. As you well know, higher education is facing considerable scrutiny today regarding rates of sexual assault and the handling of these cases on our campuses. As evidence to this fact, you may be aware that the White House Council on Women and Girls released a report in January 2014 entitled *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*. Clearly this is an issue that needs our dedicated attention, and ACPA has a role to play in addressing this issue. Accordingly, I will be appointing a “think tank” to develop recommendations for ACPA after studying the white house report and researching and discussing the critical issues. Representatives from several of ACPA’s entity groups will be asked to participate in this effort.

Finally, I believe ACPA must become more engaged in the national and international dialogue about the current state and future of higher education. Much is being written today about the social and economic effects of our current higher education system. Critics argue that the system we have built -- and fight so hard to keep -- is based on the assumptions of another era, not the era we are in today, and that we continue to perpetuate a model that increasingly is focused on serving elite students – meaning those who have the socio-economic means to afford it -- while the demographic trends clearly show that the new student majority needs and increasingly demands a more affordable model for attaining a college education. Clearly, they say, something has to change. Mega-issues of access, attainment, affordability and accountability are the big drivers.

Evidence clearly points to unprecedented demands on higher education to educate a greater number of students who are also increasingly more diverse, and with more demonstrable effectiveness and limited resources. On the subject of resources, perhaps the question we should be asking is not how do more with less, but how we do less with less, but what is most critically important and of the greatest impact. Recent articles about the Delta Cost Project illustrate why mega-issues of affordability, accessibility and accountability are increasingly more important to our field. Across higher education, it is true that expenses for student services have grown in recent years and some critics argue that these new investments were misplaced and an important factor in the rising cost of a college education; however, such criticism often ignores a number of driving forces, including 1) greater government regulation and institutional compliance, 2) increased public concerns about college completion rates, education quality, and limited evidence of demonstrated impact, and again, 3) rapidly changing student demographics. Nevertheless, in the wake of such criticism, student affairs would be wise to consider whether the current ways of doing things are the best ways going forward. Like it or not, most of higher education will not be able to continue to operate with an "additive" mentality, as though our appetite for taking on more and more and the availability of new resources are infinite. The economics of this model simply do not appear to be sustainable for most institutions.

In student affairs and across the academy, this may very well be a time for re-prioritizing and determining what matters most, thinking more about inter-disciplinary or cross-functional activity as opposed to increased specialization, and creating new structures that can better support the complexity of our work. This may require a re-examination of some of the ways we currently define our field, the scope of our work, and even our roles in fulfilling the missions of our institutions. The future of our field may depend on our will to continuously redefine ourselves and rethink student affairs organization, preparation, and practice. At the very least, I think we ought to be willing to debate these ideas. To that end, I hope you will join me in St. Louis on June 11 and 12 for a Presidential Symposium. The theme is "A Time for Rethinking Student Affairs" and the focus will be about mega-issues of Access, Affordability & Accountability in higher education and in particular how they impact our profession and work on our campuses. We hope this symposium will signal a "call to action" for ACPA and our field; an imperative to undertake serious conversations and cultivate responsible actions regarding priorities, organizational structures, professional preparation, and practice in light of these mega-issues which challenge our institutions and the current higher education system. The 2015 ACPA Convention in Tampa will be an opportunity to continue these important conversations and share new ideas and innovative practices.

As I bring my remarks to a close, I would like to say a few words about what will clearly be a year of transition for ACPA as Greg Roberts steps away from his role as executive director after more than a decade of dedicated service, and Dr. Cindi Love assumes the role and responsibility of positioning ACPA for ascension to the next level of excellence.

Greg, I want to thank you on behalf of a grateful association for all that you have done for ACPA as the association's executive director. I suspect that very few associations have been

led by an executive who previously served as the organization's chief elected officer. You have meant a great deal to ACPA and have been a good friend and colleague to so many of us. You have handled yourself with a great deal of class and professionalism, and you have clearly been a role model for embracing and living ACPA's core values. You have overseen many changes and advancements within ACPA during your time as executive director. ACPA is a strong organization with a bright future, and you have had much to do with that. We sincerely thank you for your leadership and service.

In the days, weeks, months, and hopefully years ahead, Dr. Cindi Love will build her legacy in ACPA. Her professional experience is vast, and I have no doubt she will bring great vision and leadership to our association. The selection process that led to Cindi's hiring was thorough and robust. We had very good candidates to consider, and Cindi clearly rose to the top. We owe much gratitude to the search committee and to Keith Humphrey, ACPA's past president, for his great leadership and oversight of the process.

As we move forward, let's remember this will be a year of transition. In his book, *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges describes three phases of organizational transition. The first is the "letting go" phase. At the beginning of each new transition is the end of a former era. Let's remember to support and be patient with each other as we go through this process of ending the past era. The second phase is called "in between." In this phase, the former is gone, but the new ways are still developing. It is frequently an exciting, yet somewhat uncertain period, so we will need to keep an open mind, trust one another, and be tolerant of some ambiguity. The third phase is the "new beginning", or the time when new identities and ideas are fully formed, new energy is converted into real action, and the impact or evidence of changes begins to be more apparent. Like all of you, I look forward to this phase and believe we will get there before we know it.

As Cindi and I assume our new roles, we need your support, and we want you to invite new colleagues to join us in ACPA. We need you to be open to change and to help us accelerate ACPA's actions whenever they are moving too slowly to match the pace of change externally. We need for you to continue to create new and exciting ideas and rich educational content. We need you to be engaged members, and we need your help to remove obstacles that stand in the way of advancing important association goals that enable us to make a difference in this complex world we call higher education.

Nelson Mandela once said, "I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being an optimist is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward." This is an exciting and challenging time for all of higher education, and ACPA has something very important to offer. We are an association that has the right values, talented people, resilience, and a progressive vision. There is a great adventure ahead, and this is our time. Let's make this journey together. Thank you.