



Men: On Campus RESEARCH BRIEF

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On the Need for Mentoring Women: A Man's Call to Action Paul G. Brown, First Year Advisor - Honors and Scholars Community, Miami University

Student Affairs was formed at the turn of the last century on the notion that a student's out of class life and the education of "the whole person" was a hallmark of a college education. During this time, women and "feminine values" (such as nurturing, caring, and empowering) solidified themselves at the core of a student affairs professional's values. In the beginning, and even now, women play an important part in maintaining these values and in putting them into practice with students. Women are now entering the field in record numbers and are having further effects on the profession and its direction. However, despite these achievements by women in student affairs, research continues to show institutional bias and barriers towards women achieving the greatest levels of success in student affairs. If we are to continue to hold true to our roots and if we are to continue to advance women in our profession, it is incumbent on student affairs professionals, particularly men, to take an active role in achieving the dream of gender equity in the profession.

This Brief presents information for men about how to serve as mentors to women colleagues as well as suggestions on how and why to form these relationships. The resource list included at the end of this Brief includes important research into the experiences and struggles of women in student affairs. As a basis for understanding the women we work with, this research discusses the feminization of the profession, women's issues in student affairs graduate and doctoral programs, gender diversity within the field, issues of attrition in the profession and other issues and struggles associated with female higher education administrators. The impacts these phenomena have on the field are important in providing a basis from which to advocate for the need to support female practitioners, especially at entry and mid-level positions. It is suggested that the reader familiarize themselves with this literature in order to provide a basis for the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring has always been an important means by which student affairs recruits members to the profession. Since many students enter college with no idea that the field is an option (or that it exists), mentoring and the experiences of students in the undergraduate setting are often what initiates this exposure and what can ultimately lead to their decision to pursue the field as a career choice (Hunter, 1992). This powerful means by which student affairs professionals recruit should not be lost when one looks towards the retention of new professionals, particularly women.

Numerous articles over the past decade point to the importance and need for mentors to take a central role in ensuring the success and well-being of women in the profession (Hamrick & Carlisle, 1990, How to Get and Keep, 1994, Twale, 1995, Twale & Jelinek, 1996, Blackhurst et al., 1998b, Blackhurst, 2000, Women in Student Affairs, 2001). In this instance, mentors are seasoned professionals, often supervisors, that serve to boost a protégé's self-esteem, enrich their learning experience, serve as a role model, give advice, and help in the planning for and mobility of the protégé's career (Twale & Jelinek, 1996). Mentors can also help reduce the role conflict and role ambiguity female professionals experience in their positions and thus produce women with a greater commitment to the institution and the profession (Blackhurst, 2000). Mentoring has thus become a new and oft-mentioned solution towards increasing retention and satisfaction in student affairs overall, with a particular emphasis on women and other minorities. The benefits of mentoring are also conferred on the mentors who often report that the experience is valuable and rewarding (Twale & Jelinek, 1996).

After reviewing the literature in regards to the status of women in student affairs and the overall contributions women have made to the profession, it is incumbent on all student affairs practitioners to serve as a mentor to our graduate students and new professionals. Kelly (as cited in Twale and Jelinek, 1996) reported that the mentoring experience can be cumulative. In other words, those that are mentored are more likely to be mentors themselves. Mentoring can thus take on added importance as it not only addresses the issues and concerns outlined above, but it also has a self-perpetuating effect. Although some have questioned whether or not mentoring has truly had an appreciable effect, given that it has already occurred within higher education for a number of years (Drummond, 1995), if inroads are to be made on issues of male-female representation in the field, salary inequity, attrition, and the effects of feminization, it is a duty of the professional to ensure mentoring relationships are occurring.

This duty to mentor is even more pronounced for men, as men continue to dominate the upper-levels of the profession. In much of the research, woman-to-woman mentorships were seen as valuable as man-woman mentorships (Blackhurst et al., 1998, Blackhurst, 2000, *How Leaders in Student Affairs*, 2002). In actuality a blend of all types of relationships, tailored to an individual's particular needs is probably best, but this does not remove a responsibility for men and women to reach out to these graduate students and new professionals. Mentorship and the coming together of men and women can have profound impacts on the profession and for its students.

The development and reaffirmation of men whose gender orientations are more "androgynous" can be helpful in mentoring women and advancing the profession. McEwen et al. (1991) states that, "the profession needs to acknowledge, accept, and reaffirm the value of men for the profession... who share the 'feminine' voice" (p.442). It was also further stated that, "the profession needs to, 'develop further the nurturing, altruistic qualities in men'" (McEwen et al., 1991, p.442). Developing and reaffirming these qualities can have positive effects on women and the environment for women within the field. It can also further develop the relationship-oriented and transformational leadership qualities of the profession discussed earlier.

The impact of mentoring women and assuming "feminine values" can also help in student affairs professional's work with students. As student affairs has long advocated educating the "whole person" (American College Personnel Association [ACPA] & National Association of Student Personnel administrators [NASPA], 1997), a part of this whole person philosophy includes the exploration of gender roles and socialization within one's self. As Street and Kimmel assert, "showing students how feminine and masculine traits can be incorporated into family and career enables... students to come to see the possibilities for handling their own gender issues" (1999, p. 237). Modeling the way on these issues can thus impact students in addition to impacting colleagues within the profession.

Given the research on phenomena effecting women in student affairs and the feminization of the profession, a clear case can be made for professionals to focus their energies on women and women's issues as a means of advancing the field as a whole. Mentoring relationships, and the effects of these relationships, have the possibility of finally working towards eliminating the negative effects of feminization on the field, while maximizing the benefits that women and "feminine values" have given the profession. In this area, men have a unique and important contribution to give and it is a duty of men, both as stated in student affair's professional values and its commitment to humanity as a whole, to assume these mentorships and actively work towards the advancement of women.

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Specific Recommendations for Men Mentoring Women Colleagues

If men are to take on the duty of accepting “feminine values” and the mentoring of women student affairs professionals, there are particular practices one can put in place to ensure the success of these relationships. Although each of the following recommendations would require further research to determine the best and most promising practices, the research presented previously in this paper seems to support the likelihood of success if men were to adopt the following recommendations on the mentorship of women. The practices for men suggested here, could be easily generalizable to women mentors, but men, given their status and the historical context of their dominance, are in a unique position to make mentorship and its results more effective in the academy and the profession.

1. Connect with women early on in their entry to the profession and continue this mentorship through mid-level positions. Accomplishing this will help address attrition in the profession and ensure that women are able to succeed in attaining the highest status positions in the profession.

2. Senior Student Affairs Officers and men that occupy the highest level positions of the profession are the most important mentors and must actively reach out to women. If we are to reverse the trend of women dominating entry and mid-level positions and men dominating the upper-level positions, women must be mentored by the men currently occupying those positions.

3. Men must become increasingly comfortable with and hold fast to all of the values of the profession including those that could be characterized as feminine. By accepting and embracing these values yet further, men could better reach out to women and better advocate for their interests as they are historically and intimately linked with the profession.

4. Graduate and Doctoral programs must include the study of at least the major theorists in women’s development and should include an in depth analysis of women’s issues and feminism. Since much of the socialization process within the profession occurs within these programs, it is necessary that both men and women be exposed to these issues. Also, if the profession itself is “feminized” it must recognize the scholarship of feminists to capitalize on its strengths and turn the negative aspects of feminization into positive empowering ones.

5. Men must continue to work towards creating a non-sexist environment within the profession and at the academy. Doing so can lead to progress on more quantitative measures such as equity and gender distribution in the profession.

6. Lastly, men must reach out to others in the university to reverse the notion that student affairs is “women’s work” and that it should be “devalued.” Men, as men, are in a particularly favorable position to show that the issues of student affairs should be the issues of all University officials. Increasing the stature of and prestige of student affairs can lead to inroads on salary and other resultant issues.

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