

Practitioner Philosophy Statement:
Compassion and Calls to Action

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In the short time that I have been a higher education professional, a few things have been made clear to me through my work in this graduate program and in conversations with my colleagues: (1) higher education, by all standards and government support (or lack thereof), is currently a privilege rather than a right, (2) there are more inequities in our system of higher education and within my own institution than I had assumed, from low impact to high impact and everything in between, and (3) the model of higher education as we know it does not adequately reflect our population or the wants and needs of our population. As an administrator, my choices and opportunities to directly influence these systems in an immediate, large, or visible way is limited to areas within my influence; however, my firm belief that higher education is a right for every citizen is integral to the ways in which I conduct myself in my profession with my colleagues and my students.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe some of my strongest held beliefs and values and utilize student development theory to describe a set of guiding principles for my role as an administrator in higher education. It is important to recognize that these principles and values are not part of a static list. Instead, these few named principles are meant as a malleable framework that I can continue to build upon and change when I learn new information and obtain different experiences.

Values

It is difficult to distill my personal values into words; not because I am unsure of my values, but rather because I could spend pages describing my values and who shaped them. From my personal experience as a dancer and a performer, I value personal discipline, physical fitness, and bodily autonomy. As a lifelong Girl Scout, I value courage, kindness, and accountability. In college, I learned the meaning of defining and creating a community, and developed values of

transparency, compassion, and equity. When I was a professional Scouter in the Boy Scouts of America, I nurtured the values of helpfulness, teamwork, and service to others. As a higher education professional, I have come to understand the importance of clear communication, responsible and ethical decision-making, and experience.

These values are but a few distilled examples pull directly from my personal experience, though there are many more to be explored. Both Scouting programs offer their own sets of laws and oaths that contain other important values. Arguably, each of these experiences also contributed to my value of timeliness and time management. It is also worth noting that some of my values have grown and developed over time throughout all of these experiences. Though I might attribute my introduction to the values of personal discipline as a dancer from a young age, that value was reinforced at each and every one of my other experiences listed.

Application of Theory

In order to actually list and define principles that are truly distilled from my personal values, I turn to my favorite student development theory concept I have learned: self-authorship. Central to nearly every theory we discussed in this course was the idea that the individual had to recognize and work on something in themselves to advance to the next stage of any given model. Arguably, self-authorship could fit in as a part of many other student development theory models. In fact, self-authorship, “or the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269), is the very theory that allows me to define this set of guiding principles for this assignment.

To assist in maintaining the principles that are derived directly from my values, I turn to the three elements of self-authorship that Baxter Magolda describes: learning to trust their internal voices, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (Baxter

Magolda, 2008). Though these elements are identifiable in my own thought process and principle making, it is also important to recognize that students are on their own journeys of self-authorship. For many students, college is likely their first foray into defining their own personal beliefs. Since “self-authorship evolves when the challenge to become self-authoring is present and is accompanied by sufficient support to help an individual make the shift to internal meaning making” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 271), it is important that all of my principles are guided by notion of creating and maintaining sufficient support for students on their journey towards self-authorship.

Principles

Continuously question and challenge the motivation of requests and strategic plans.

As I have learned to trust my internal voice and maintain a sense of autonomy even when completing work on behalf of others, I challenge myself to always ask questions. Why are we using this process for this task? Does this program actually serve students? Is there a better way to accomplish the goal? Those questions are just a few examples of this principle in process. Without a defined internal voice, this line of questioning and critical thinking about external forces is impossible. Furthermore, this principle incorporates my values of transparency, accountability, and service to others. Without asking questions of this nature, it is impossible to hold parties responsible and accountable in the service of others.

Where I can make a change and/or an improvement, I will.

Understanding my strengths that are grounded in personal experience or professional training will allow me to positively impact my colleagues and students. Where I can make a difference, I should and will. In keeping my values of helpfulness, teamwork, and personal discipline, my ability to work cooperatively for positive change is a strong motivator in my

work. In addition to serving others, being helpful offers me personal fulfillment and assists in developing and maintaining my own internal foundation.

Meet students where they are; each student is unique and has different needs.

When a student needs assistance or has a question, I must refrain from making any assumptions. If a student is asking a question, it means they are looking for some guidance. Though answers can typically be found throughout various resources on campus or within the department, not every student has the same ability to independently identify that information. Instead of growing frustrated with being asked an “easy” question, I should look at these moments as opportunities to equip students with tools they haven’t had access to before. This supports my values of kindness, compassion, and equity to name a few.

Implications and In Practice

Without being overly ambitious, three principles seemed like a strong grounding framework to establish initially. With these principles in mind, my work going forward will not look all that different from what I am currently doing. Questioning how and why we do things, engaging in making changes where I can, and approaching my interactions with students (and colleagues) with understanding and compassion are things I have intuitively done from the start. My own personal challenge moving forward is to approach my work with intentionality.

Instead of falling into relaxed habits that might coincide with these principles, these principles should instead guide my actions and habits. This means that I should begin my interactions with compassion rather than fall into it. I should always consider different possibilities and options for approaching problems in different ways. Instead of making a change only when I notice it, I should look ahead for things I can change.

These principles are not the only principles in my life, nor are they the final draft. I look forward to learning more in this graduate program so that I might further hone my skills and develop these principles. Perhaps I might find other values and principles along the way to incorporate into my professional practice. With the same approach I took to this course, and to this assignment, I now approach the next steps in my professional career with the intention of developing and maintaining my own sense of self-authorship.

References

- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2008). Three elements of self-authorship. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(4), 269–284. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0016>