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# Some of the Early Story: The Beginnings of the Association for Christians in Student Development

By David M. Johnstone

## Abstract

A reasonable critique of American student affairs is that the profession does not utilize its heritage and history. The profession leans heavily on the praxis of its responsibilities to the detriment that it has a long history and those who worked diligently in years past have made what happens today possible. The Association for Christians in Student Development has a significant history. Some of it parallels contemporary culture, while some of it is unique. However, the current association reflects the vision of early “pioneers.” This article seeks to begin filling the gap, provide a sense of how the association arose and honor those who had a vision and pursued it.

## Some of the Early Story:

### The Beginnings of the Association for Christians in Student Development

In 1978, a cluster of essays was released by a group of prominent student affairs administrators. They observed:

Few administrators see the relevance or importance of historical forces and issues to the present status of student affairs administration. ... History provides a perspective and without an understanding of the role our predecessors played, the circumstances in which they worked, and the contributions they made ... we have a truncated knowledge of our profession. ... *In our field, the present is a dominant preoccupation* [emphasis added]. The price of this preoccupation is the diminution of our predecessors but also of ourselves. (Appleton et al., 1978, p. 9)

Three decades later, the *present* still dominates the world of higher education administration. We look to the future in our strategic planning, goals and objectives, but are mostly immersed in the present. The past is sometimes acknowledged, but rarely, and it is often viewed as irrelevant. This article suggests that it is not irrelevant. The role of Jesus' followers is particularly important in the history of American higher education. Faith and higher education continuously intersect throughout history. As our focus is narrowed and the historical roots and impact of Christian student affairs are examined, we quickly recognize that the Association for Christians in Student Development (and its predecessors) has played and continues to play a major role in North America. Its formal beginning in 1980 has many facets and nuances. Those involved mentored many who are now retiring or have left the field. Many current voices in Christian student affairs are now the third generation since those early days. To fully understand Christian student affairs' role and impact, the narratives and stories regarding earlier individuals must be acknowledged and understood in order that we do not *diminish ourselves* and what we seek to accomplish with college students. The insight and experience of the past may surprise us with its relevancy and applicability. This is the reason for this article.

## The History of Christian Student Development

Events in the 1960s helped consolidate a major shift in the world of American higher education. Colleges and universities began to move away from the prevailing educational philosophy or doctrine of *in loco parentis* which defined how universities and colleges related institutionally to their students. Historically, students had been viewed as children living outside of parents' protection; therefore, the institution took on the prerogative and responsibility to act on behalf of parents or "in the place of parents" (*in loco parentis*) (Doyle, 2004, p. 69). While institutions' relationships with their students had been evolving for decades, this evolution was accelerated during this era due to political and social unrest present in American culture. This specific administrative philosophy or doctrine (as called by some) of *in loco parentis* was defining how students lived both formally and informally in relationship with their universities and colleges. These changes away from *in loco parentis* (particularly in the co-curricular lives of students) were partly due to student affairs professionals moving away from managing student behavior as their primary focus to interacting and responding to students as maturing adults. There was an increasing recognition that student affairs personnel were needing to take a greater role in the pedagogical mission of their institution.

A similar shift was taking place among evangelical institutions and their administrators. One eventual result of this shift was the creation of the Association for Christians in Student Development (ACSD). In 1980 this organization was created by the merger of the Christian Association of Deans of Women (CADW) and the Association of Christian Deans and Advisors of Men (ACDAM). In order to understand the background of this merger, some historical details are important.

### Student Affairs as Student Services Personnel (1925-1960)<sup>1</sup>

The history of student affairs in higher education, from its earliest time until the 19th century, was concerned with providing an education which went beyond just acquiring knowledge (Student Personnel Point of View [SPPV], 1949). With the rise of German intellectualism in the latter part of the 19th century and its primary focus on scholarly development, there was a paucity of concern for the social, moral and spiritual development of students (SPPV, 1949). Academic and intellectual growth were given the priority. In America, German intellectualism was embraced by many academics as their chosen guiding philosophy of education. In 1937, and then once again in 1949, the American Council on Education (ACE) released a document titled "*The Student Personnel Point of View* (SPPV)." It was an attempt to challenge the prevailing perspective and realign how higher education related to students on American college campuses. The report encouraged institutions to understand students as individuals rather than purely as containers for knowledge (SPPV, 1937, 1949). While document referred to "student group life" (SPPV, 1949, p. 19) as an indication of its interest in community, it was primarily concerned with encouraging institutions and academic professionals to view students in a broader way than just as recipients of intellectual data. It was a pointed challenge to view students in a holistic manner.

The SPPV (1949) recognized that a student's growth is ultimately his or her own responsibility. At the same time, it also asserted that educational institutions had an

<sup>1</sup>In 1997, Loy and Painter, in their survey of American student affairs, conveniently divided history into periods. Each time period was loosely defined by the philosophical approach by which student affairs practitioners interacted with "students." In this article, we do not touch on the periods before 1925.

“obligation to consider the student as a whole” (SPPV, 1937, p. 2). In many ways, the SPPV report gave impetus for the direction in which student affairs was moving. It was seminal in that it set the tone for subsequent scholarship which helped shape student affairs.

Some of the key and enduring components of the document were that students needed to be taught with their whole being (socially, intellectually, spiritually, etc.) in mind. Furthering the education of the individual student was accomplished by and was the responsibility of the entire institution. Therefore the profession of student affairs was identified as a real and legitimate part of an institution. In short, the SPPV asserted that student affairs personnel were recognized as educators committed to supporting the formal and informal educational mission of the university. The writers acknowledged that student affairs administrators differed from instructors and other formal teachers. Yet, the focus of student affairs personnel on out-of-classroom curriculum and experiences was essential for a student’s educational development (Bloland, Stamatakos & Rogers, 1994).

SPPV mirrored what had already been happening on many campuses. Particular employees of universities and colleges were identified to address matters of student campus life (Doyle, 2004; Bloland et al., 1994). As early as 1903, men and women began gathering to better understand the lives of college students, how to administer their responsibilities and shape their experiences. These were the early student affairs professionals. As these gatherings formalized, they became critical for providing support, encouragement, consultation and learning which eventually took the focus of emerging and current national associations of student affairs professionals. These groups included the foundation of the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW) in 1916, and the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Men (NADAM) in 1919 (which later became the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, NASPA) (Gerda, 2006).

In 1955, two Christian deans of women at Providence-Barrington Bible College, Rhode Island, invited presidents of Christian peer institutions to send their deans of women to a three-day gathering for counsel and fellowship. This group met in March of 1955 on their campus in Rhode Island. They met again in 1956 at Columbia Bible College in South Carolina. During this second meeting they established the structure of a new organization, selected executive officers and chose the name “Christian Association of Deans of Women” (*History*, n.d.).

Parallel to this, in 1955, deans of men who were part of the NADAM gathered at Moody Bible College in Chicago. In 1957, they decided to formalize their meetings and created the Association of Christian Deans and Advisors of Men with the purpose of not only encouragement and fellowship, but a desire to examine topics pertinent to student affairs from a Christian perspective (Zopfi, 1991). While the specific catalysts which prompted these gender-specific gatherings and organizations are not clear, the results reflected the SPPV emphasis that student affairs professionals were educators and life-long learners.

### **Student Affairs as Developmental Science (1969-present)**

Jumping ahead a couple of decades, the growing student affairs profession reexamined the perspective provided by the foundations of the SPPV. In 1975, the Association of College Personnel Administrators (ACPA) published *Tomorrow's Higher Education Project* (THE). The document asserted that *student development* should be the foundation of all work within student affairs. THE is viewed by some historians of higher education as one of the primary guides for the profession for the subsequent 20 years (Doyle, 2004). THE maintained that the SPPV was no longer contextually

adequate for shaping how administrators responded to their students. Student development theories, as highlighted in THE, directed the attention of educators to the individual students' development as distinct from the pedagogical goals and purposes of their institution (Bloland et al., 1994; Loy & Painter, 1997).

In that same year, the Council of Student Associations in Higher Education (CSAHE) published the *Student Development Services in Post Secondary Education Report* (SDSPE) (Loy & Painter, 1997). Similar to THE, this document affirmed the need for student affairs practitioners to become proficient in developmental theories outlined in psychology and sociology. THE and the SDSPE both affirmed the boundless possibilities for students and affirmed that human developmental theories must function as the bedrock of student affairs practice (Doyle, 2004). It is important to note that student affairs as a profession was entrenching itself solidly within the sphere of the behavioral sciences.

The SDSPE introduced student affairs to the competencies generally called for in developmental theories. The document viewed those in student affairs as facilitators assisting students in their own learning processes. Student affairs personnel stood in contrast to the faculty emphasis which sought to provide content; student affairs personnel were to focus on the process of learning (Cooper, 1975). Student affairs, now viewed as *student development*, emphasized the individual's process of maturation. The SDSPE articulated that most student life priorities should be assessed in light of the positive development of human relationships—both individual and corporate. The language of the document was replete with phrases referring to the “unlimited potential” of students (Cooper, 1975, p. 525), the importance of “process” (Cooper, 1975, p. 527), and a focus on “self direction” (Cooper, 1975, pp. 525, 527) and “self-development” (Cooper, 1975, p. 528). This language appears to have been a natural progression of the alignment of many student development professionals viewing their work through the paradigms presented in the behavioral sciences.

One of the unfortunate effects of this philosophical emphasis was that some student development practitioners began to view themselves as having a greater role in the education of a student than their faculty colleagues (Doyle, 2004). They saw themselves as being more attuned to students and their pedagogical needs. However, many developmental theories were still unproven; their credibility had not been established. Not surprisingly, confusion and tension arose between student affairs practitioners and faculty members even though both were equally committed to the educational enterprise of their students.

The field of student affairs was not uniform throughout the nation or even within individual institutions. There had been a significant shift from the 1949 perspective of a student affairs officer being an administrator to the 1975 vision of an educator seeking the development of students. *Student development* was a nascent field, unproven in its claims of being able to guide and craft how student affairs practitioners cared for college students. However, it was seized by many in student affairs as being a significant paradigm by which to view their work. These varying and sometimes competing perspectives were part of the context in which ACSD was formed.

### **The Beginning of ACSD**

At the beginning of the 1970s, the United States Congress passed legislation called the *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* (USDOL, 1972). This particular amendment asserted that no persons within the USA could be excluded on the basis of their gender from programs or activities benefitting from federal funds. It primarily held implications for educational institutions, their sports, activities and associated organizations. While it took a few years, the federal government finally implemented

laws in 1975 that gave the amendment some authority. As a result, many institutions and organizations began the task of scrutinizing their practices to ensure that they were in compliance with the federal mandates.

In early 1977, Gene Hovee, the president of the Association of Christian Deans and Advisors of Men, wrote to the leadership of the Christian Association of Deans of Women. He posed the exploratory and unofficial question of whether, in light of the federal regulations tied to the Title IX Amendments relating to gender-exclusive organizations, there would be interest or benefit in the two organizations merging. The two organizations already had very cordial and respectful relationships due to many members being colleagues at the same institutions. CADW shared locations for annual meetings and maintained strong organizational relationships with ACDAM, yet both were separate organizational entities defined by gender.

The responses from the CADW executives were polite but uninterested. Legally, they did not see the merger as necessary. Further, they raised other concerns about a possible merger. One executive suggested that the general CADW constituency would not be in favor of such a move (Watts, 1977). Another viewed a merger as having significant disadvantages for their own organization, particularly because women at Christian colleges found many opportunities for leadership within the CADW and were well represented by the organization. Comparable organizational roles were not available at their own institution and could possibly be lost in a merger (Hoglund, 1977). The president of CADW responded with the opinion that merging would not be a good response to the requirements of the Title IX legislation; she went on to explain that she was currently seeking counsel from their secular counterpart, the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors (Lauffer, 1977). While they were consistent in their hesitation toward the idea of a merger, the leaders of CADW were willing to continue discussing this possibility at a future date.

A year later in June 1978, while Hovee presided over the annual business meeting of the ACDAM, the organization's relationship with the CADW arose once again out of Title IX concerns. Six men were appointed by the association to study the matter of their relationship with the CADW (ACDAM, 1978). In anticipating that a formal organizational relationship might occur in the future, the ACDAM leadership began eliminating gender-specific language from their literature and business documents and changed their terminology of constitution and by-laws to more gender-neutral language (ACDAM, 1978). Interestingly, in spite of a growing desire for cooperation, the CADW voted in a parallel meeting to remain autonomous (ACDAM, 1978).

In June of 1979, the ACDAM voted to change its name to the gender-neutral *Christian Association for Student Affairs* (CASA). In November of that year, the leadership of CASA was joined by the executive leadership of CADW (CADW/CASA, 1979). Discussion about the possible merger continued with the suggestion that a sample constitution and by-laws be created for each organizational executive to consider.

Miriam Uphouse, president of CADW, wrote to all of the organization's members in February 1980. She proceeded to outline the history and reasons behind the conversations with CASA about a possible merger. Reflecting utilitarian perspectives, she outlined the advantages and realities of a decision to proceed in this direction. She indicated that a merger would demonstrate better stewardship of the money and time devoted to the organization's purposes. With the larger and diversified demographic that a new organization would provide, they could anticipate broader and more robust counsel, wisdom and resources. She also pointed out the obvious fact that most of the members of both CADW and CASA interacted with colleagues and students of both genders; therefore, meeting together would not be such an unusual step.

She observed that regional groups of both national organizations were currently meeting in such a manner with no concerns. Last of all, she noted that while CASA was not yet open to female membership, when it had eliminated gender-specific terminology from their literature some months earlier, women had immediately begun to apply for membership with the organization (Uphouse, 1980a).

After making these points, Uphouse and CADW polled their membership, asking what they desired with regards to a merger with CASA. By April, after polling 105 members, they received 73 responses; all but three were in favor of a merger (Uphouse, 1980b). At CASA and CADW's annual June meeting, both groups passed motions to dissolve their organizations and form a new one together (CADW, 1980; CADW & CASA, 1980). On June 5, 1980, the Association of Christians in Student Development<sup>2</sup> (ACSD) was birthed. In response to the original concerns about numbers, power and representation, two presidents were proposed (one from each of the past organizations) for the initial "transition" year. Thus Don Boender (formerly of CASA) and Miriam Uphouse (formerly of CADW) served as joint presidents of ACSD for the first year (ACSD, 1980).

The new organization did not yet have a final draft of their constitution. Over the next months, ACSD executives continued to craft its new constitution and organizational goals (Boender, 1980a; Irvine, 1980; Zopfi, 1980a). In October of 1980, the leadership stated that both professional and spiritual growth should be priorities for the new ACSD. As part of the spiritual emphasis, integration of biblical principles into student affairs was critical. On a practical side, the executives stated that the organization was to provide placement services, publications and other tools. They also gave preeminence to communication, fellowship and encouragement as defining the organization's goals (Boender, 1980b; Irvine, 1980b; Jagers, 1980; Uphouse, 1980c). Implied, but not stated overtly, was the role of a student affairs professional as an educator. These priorities of providing resources and placement services became major components of the new association's mission and character.<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion: History Interpreted**

In the meeting which brought together CASA and CADW, there was discussion regarding the name of the new organization. As indicated by the association's name including the word "development," there was support and familiarity with the student development language of the day (Loy & Trudeau, 2000). There has been some suggestion that this alignment with student development theory was done "without examining the philosophical underpinning or its compatibility with the Christian faith" (Loy, n.d.). However, over time, the organization has not locked itself into one philosophical perspective. Since those early days of the organization, there have been writers from within and without who have broadened and challenged both the understanding of student affairs, higher education and the role of Christians in these spheres.

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing awareness among members of ACSD about their roles in shaping the out-of-classroom experiences of students on college campuses. Members are increasingly affirming that they are more than campus activity providers and caregivers; they have a role to play in the educational

<sup>2</sup>The minutes demonstrate that the use of "of" was included in the original title; yet within four months, it was the Association "for" Christians in Student Development.

<sup>3</sup>Note that there was no mention of educational role within these priorities; this omission was missing from early correspondence and other archived documents.

development of the student. In an attempt to infuse Christ into their work, members have sought to balance both a missional (in regards to institutional pedagogical mission) and a developmental (as in processing learning experiences) role within the lives of their students.

In looking at student affairs in America, one historian made the observation that the profession has not fully utilized its history and heritage (Gerda, 2006). Others suggest that history is underappreciated and neglected in student affairs (Appleton, Briggs & Rhatigan, 1978). They caution readers that “we cannot afford to continue a legacy of indifference” (Appleton et al., 1978). This is one of the reasons why recording this narrative is important. Those working in higher education with students should have some understanding about their professional heritage and community in order to make wise decisions for the future.

ACSD has been true to its history and original intentions (ACSD, 2006) and has increasingly clarified its pedagogical role within higher education. Early concerns by the CADW about adequate representation and leadership for women seem to be resolved – at least at the leadership level.

The association has sought to engage the world of higher education by encouraging members to participate in organizations and conferences beyond the evangelical sphere and pursue substantive relations with counterparts at secular institutions. It is actively working at greater and more profound engagement with issues of cultural diversity and trying to discern its role in what has become an international conversation. Most of all, it has been a place where members wrestle intellectually and seek to infuse their commitment to Christ into all that they do as educators and practitioners. While these efforts are not exclusive to ACSD, the organization has the potential for speaking creatively into concerns and challenges faced by student affairs. A constant challenge to the organization has been to understand personal and organizational identities in light of the philosophies and history that have shaped American higher education and student affairs. Understanding the context and heritage of an organization such as the ACSD is one of the initial steps in understanding the field’s identity and (sometimes prophetic) role within higher education and even the Kingdom of God.

## **Contributor**

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