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### My Philosophy of Education and the Work & Ongoing Impact of Student Affairs: The SHIELD of Tomorrow

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."  
—Nelson Mandela*

Reflecting on my experiences, my education and training, my skills and strengths, my deficiencies and disappointments, my values and passions, and how my personal life has forever changed by the work I love over the past 15 years, I am drawn back to Mandela, cited above, articulating **the power that education has as an agent of change in this world**. I see it globally, as archaic and bigoted principles, beliefs, and laws ebb and flow as educators and researchers provide new meanings and evidence to society. I see it locally, in my students, as they absorb knowledge and wisdom through teaching and experience, then venturing out and utilizing what they have learned to uplift communities and alter their limited worldviews. I see it in myself, as an educator, citizen, and lifelong learner, my growth and future opportunity derived from absorbing all this world offers. **Education truly is society's SHIELD** (amplifying **S**tudent-centered, **H**olistic, **I**nnovative, **E**xperiential, **L**eadership-focused, & **D**EI-infused practices) **of tomorrow**, so long as we have the strength and resolve to fight, advocate, fund, and free it from rampant sociopolitical pressures and constraints.

*"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."  
—Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**I am a pragmatic cognitive progressivist**; I believe the purpose of thinking and learning is action, uncovering passion and value to improve the world around us. I believe in student-centered and experiential learning systems that evolve and grow to meet the needs of learners rather than teachers, who must also learn, evolve, and grow to meet learners where they are. Learning inspires humanity to community consciousness, uplifting and protecting agreed-upon measures of accountability and stewardship, which build strong communities in the learning environment. Learners construct understanding by interacting with their environment and peers and by reflecting on their own actions and the consequences from them.

### **Education as the SHIELD of Tomorrow**

*"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled."  
—Plutarch*

**S** I believe in and value: **students centered, students first, students always**. My work will always be directionally aligned with student-centeredness, first and foremost. This, for me, is non-negotiable, underpinning the core of my decision-making, my thinking, my supervision styles of other professional staff, and my leadership across the entire campus community.

*"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."  
—Malcolm Forbes*

**H** I believe in and value: **holistic approaches** that examine the whole student, capturing the Jesuit ideal of *Cura Personalis*, which when translated from Latin means 'care for the entire person.' This is especially meaningful in our work within student affairs as we build interventions for learning, development, and success for the student's mind, body, and spirit across our functional areas. I value **lifelong learning**, and I love the challenge of tackling new projects, developing greater understanding, and solving various problems. I enjoy innovating, pivoting, and developing new skills to do so, while empowering students to do the same. I value **critical approaches to contemporary issues**, staying up to date on trends impacting higher education and our students. I value the application of critical theory, noting that past theoretical constructs were developed from predominantly white, male, and privileged lenses. I value **inquiry-focused mindsets** for student affairs work; I value the infusion of educational, student development, and identity development **theory**, best and high-impact **practices**, and data and evidence from **assessment, evaluation, and research** into daily student affairs practice. I am driven by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory; Kahu's Student Engagement Model; Astin's Student Involvement Theory; Bloom's Taxonomy of Student Learning; Maslow's Hierarchy of Student Needs; Schlossberg's Student Transition Theory and Marginalization and Mattering Theory; Chickering & Reisser's Psychosocial Development Theory; Perry's Cognitive-Structural Development Theory; Sandeen's Person-Environment Constructs; Gallup's CliftonStrengths Leadership Assessment; Knefelkamp's Continuous Improvement / Theory-Informed Practice Model; Hays' Intersectionality Model; Smith's DEI Strategic Institutional Framework; and the vitally important work of Josselson; Belenky; Gilligan; Cross & Fhagen-Smith; Helms; Row; Phinney; Kinsey; Cass; D'Augelli; Fassinger; and others. By **synthesizing these tools and mapping them** to student and campus characteristics, mission, vision, values, and goals, we **transform our practice from mediocre to exemplary**.

*"One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world."  
—Malala Yousafzai*

**I** I believe in and value: **forging innovation through evidence-informed decision-making that leads to meaningful change and beneficial impacts** for the direct benefit of students. I **reject the status quo** and I believe that the most dangerous phrase in education is, 'we've always done it that way.' I encourage brainstorming, collaboration, Socratic questioning, and playing the devil's advocate. I ask questions as well as offering feedback

and suggestions. I actively and vocally encourage staff to do the same. I do not have a problem with failure; if one gave it their all, if they made logical, student-centered, and evidence-based decisions, and if they covered all contingencies, I stand by them and their attempt. Such is not failure so long as it did not result from laziness, apathy, dereliction, or intentional oversight, serving as a critical teacher. I value continuously gathering new information, knowledge, and data, not just to make better decisions, but to best understand situational or environmental contexts. I believe that understanding such context, as in the full picture of the past and present, helps us best understand the power of current decision-making models and shape future interventions. Student affairs educators **must recognize context**, understand institutional past, and navigate nuance effectively noting our profession's interconnectedness. I do not do well with teams that are all talk and no action; rather, I am an **action-, results-, and progress-oriented professional**. I enter a space, examine it holistically, develop and actuate plans, lead strategically, manage tactically, assess results, reexamine the space for progress, and begin again. I am driven to **leave a space better than whence I found it**.

I love **translating data and research into meaningful stories** for constituents and stakeholders to best represent how student affairs positively impacts student learning, development, and success, while honestly showcasing shortcomings and how to address them. I love researching different generations living and working in the United States and across the globe, especially understanding how different generations interact in the workplace and the classroom, and how to help them find common ground. I **publish and present on a variety of topics**. I love building comprehensive assessment frameworks and helping staff incorporate meaningful assessment into daily operations to benefit students. I am spearheading two in-depth, peer-reviewed research projects, while also consulting for IUPUI's Assessment Institute. I love integrating meaningful technology in student affairs programs, services, and facilities, while developing vitally important interpersonal, career, and leadership skills with students.

*"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."  
—Benjamin Franklin*

**E** I believe in and value: **high-quality experiential learning** in the curriculum, through faculty-guided research, internships and cooperatives, and field work, and in the cocurriculum, through **involvement in campus programming, leadership opportunities in shared governance and student groups, and student advocacy, service learning, and civic engagement**. Student engagement theory tells us that students who are **agents in their own educational, learning, and developmental journeys** find greater academic success, increased employability post-college, and generally more satisfaction in their experiences on campus. By involving students deeply in their learning, especially when mapped to **high-quality, high-impact practices**, they extract more value from their time and energy spent in higher education.

*"Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave."  
—Peter Brougham*

**L** I believe in and value: **modeling strong leadership**-focused practices for the campus community, synthesizing five valuable leadership styles.

- **SERVANT**: I am considerate of **my team's needs**, advocating for them and working for their success. I oftentimes lead from behind, **encouraging them to drive** a project or program to success, while offering encouragement or ideas from the background. I stress **communicating and listening**, building **trust**, and remaining **transparent, open, and honest**. I never ask them to do something that I would not be **willing to do**.
- **DEMOCRATIC**: I foster an environment where **everyone has a seat at the table and a voice** in the decision-making process. I **dismantle** systems that 'other' individuals and rebuild **equitable and inclusive** teams. I support individuals, as well as the team. I defer to **consensus-based** decision-making, but respect majority opinions if mine falls in the minority. I **value innovation** to solve problems.
- **TRANSFORMATIONAL**: I support individual's professional and personal **goals and experiences**. I want my team to savor every growth experience while working with me. I want them to **grow, learn, and develop** just as much as our students. We challenge each other to do, know, and be more; we commit to **disrupt the status quo** and grow comfortable with change. I consistently communicate feedback for support and growth.
- **COACHING / MOTIVATIONAL**: I dig in and do not believe in strict hierarchies; they exist to subjugate instead of **empower**. I coach improvement on student-serving and thinking skills, zeroing in on individual strengths, weaknesses, motivations, and passions to achieve expectations. I **reject one-size fits-all** team approaches. My **feedback** will include celebrations, areas for improvement, and requests for feedback of me.
- **VISIONARY**: I commit to progress and **growing the team's impact**. I inspire a **recommitment to our 'why,'** establishing pathways forward but requiring input on how to get there. For the team, I construct **vision** and rely on individual expertise, strengths, and passions to build interventions, supports, and programs to meet it; I set **tone and tenor** and rely on flexibility, innovation, and collaboration to match it.

I value commitments to **service**, knowing that such is leadership and learning in action. I value **collaboration**, knowing that outcomes are strongest when barriers are torn down and resources are combined. I value **stewardship, accountability, and transparency**, knowing that trust is built most effectively when empathy is informed through consistent application of standards and when sunshine is poured into darkness. I value **building trust, empowering individuals and teams, and speaking truth to power**, especially when amplifying student voices.

*"Education in this country is about how to maintain the status quo and to perpetuate racism."  
—Jane Elliot*

**D** I believe in and value: practices infused with **diversity, equity, inclusion, access, social justice, sense of belonging, and community-building**. I fervently support the incorporation of such practices and interventions in holistic educational curricula and cocurricula, as well as **amplifying systemically marginalized and minoritized voices**, since students can only be centered in our work if student affairs educators work collaboratively to ensure that the campus community, its environment, and its climate welcome all, reflect all, and be one for all. Challenging the status quo and recognizing higher education's history as one built upon privilege and power requires me as an educator to work diligently to bust barriers that systemically prevent student access. I believe that inclusion and justice are requisite for students to feel belonging and community on campus, and I continue to build **intentional anti-racist, conscious and unconscious bias, privilege and power, and intersectionality trainings**. I revise assessment and evaluation frameworks from **equity-centered perspectives**. I have served on **institutional and national DEI councils**, and I assisted in **drafting anti-racist statements, bias response policies, and equity-minded strategic plans**.