

Frederic Gratto and Katherine Gratto
If You Build It They Will Go ... Creating Opportunities Within
Academic Programs To Develop Good Citizens

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Abstract

College students have been placed in our care for instruction, development and growth for a very short time period. Academic programs have the unique opportunity to impact these students in their journey to become responsible citizens with integrity and strong ethical standards. Getting students involved with other students and community members will enhance this process. The University of Florida affords students many opportunities to serve others through community organizations, campus clubs and academic requirements. Encouraging students to consider their own character and take into account others, so they can be more caring citizens is part of what higher education should be about. Education and character development should go hand in hand because they provide resources needed to improve the human condition. It's a good idea, once in a while, to stop and think about what we are doing to help students and how we can assess and improve our goals and methods.

College students are with us for only a little while, usually just four or five years. Since research has proven that college changes students, we ought to be alert and get involved to help them through the changes that are sure to come. Some of these might be changes in

their attitudes, values, character, and self-esteem. Another thing we know is that involvement on campus helps college students learn about others. Learning takes place in and out of classrooms, something for us to keep in mind when we plan programs to impact the character of college students. In addition to knowledge and training, college students need the basic qualities of integrity, imagination, common sense, self-control, and a strong work ethic if they are going to be successful. It occurs to us that it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to acknowledge that students might need help with character development.

As a point of reference regarding character development of students, we considered the wisdom and experience of Roger Babson. A graduate of Massachusetts Institute of technology, he applied Newton's laws of action and reaction to investment banking and extended his influence into counseling and public welfare. He was interested in helping young men and women so he founded Babson College in 1919, still an esteemed institution of higher learning today. Babson understood that students need to be technically qualified to do well in work environments. He also believed that personal character was just as critical to success at work and in life. He stated, "It is not knowledge which young people need for success, so much as those basic qualities of integrity, industry, imagination, common sense, self-control and a willingness to struggle and sacrifice." Today's students represent the future. Who they become as adults is very much a result of what they learn in college. Some of what they learn from faculty and staff impacts character. Regarding student character, Bloom, 1987, stated, "The souls of young people are in a condition like that of the first men in the state of nature - spiritually unclad, unconnected, isolated, with no inherited or unconditional connection with anything or anyone. They can become anything they want to be but they have no particular reason to want to be anything in particular" (p.87). Concern by faculty and staff can help students want to become something in particular, such as more informed and better citizens.

Character isn't something that can be handed to someone. It is built by choices and decisions every day. Based on our observations of students' character, the two things students should become more aware of are service to others and their own character because it produces vital life skills.

Service to Others

People should be changed and refined to become better people and better citizens as a result of going to college. The experience ought to shape character, as well as prepare and encourage students to contribute to society. For example, by providing a variety of experiences, Pacific Lutheran University seeks to develop in students the joy of abundant living, a concern for the welfare of others, personal integrity, good manners, and a sense of social propriety. President William Rieke stated, "The high purpose of education is the use of one's knowledge and training for the betterment of society" (Wills, 1992, p. 34). This perspective ought to encourage us to be concerned about the character development of students because through involvement and by observing adults interact, students learn to help others, become team players, and develop a sense of caring. This is especially important because it helps them learn and appreciate the value of service and

prepares them for future success working in groups. Service to others is good stuff and it is not just giving. Students also benefit because they gain insights. The joy and satisfaction and frustration involved in helping others shapes perspectives and is experience that changes lives. We have found that experiences of service to others are more significant and lasting if students reflect and report on the experience and consider how it is related to what they have been studying in school. The goal is to help students consider the connection between what they learn and how they live.

Considering all the people we meet everyday who need help, ours is a low caring society because there is so much more that could be done. Therefore, it seems that a person who sincerely tries to serve others has a distinct advantage because there is so little competition in this area. The colleges where we work probably don't offer a degree in service, but it's really what we need to be working toward. There are a multitude of opportunities for students to be involved in service through community organizations and campus activities. The Gainesville, Florida community has many of these activities. Through the March of Dimes WalkAmerica, students can earn money to help with research for healthier babies. Habitat for Humanity and Youthbuild connect youth, community members and university participants in the construction of new homes for needy people. SAIL (Summer Adventures in Literacy), America Reads and Bright Futures are all reading tutoring programs by which students have the opportunity to work with struggling readers. Goodwill Gators is an additional opportunity for university athletes to give back to the community serving as mentors or tutors in the area public schools. Hope for the Holidays gives students and university personnel the opportunity to work together to help needy community families have an enjoyable holiday season. Donations with this program have resulted in many essential household or personal items as furniture, food and clothing.

EDF 1005 Introduction to Education

At the University of Florida, EDF 1005 Introduction to Education is a course that has a community service component. It has been successful in teaching students through service to others. Each semester all students volunteer for 30 hours in public schools. Their responsibilities can involve serving as a tutor, instructional aide or grader while dealing with classroom management,.

The academic goal is for the students to be exposed to the classroom experience from the perspective of a teacher. This experience helps the students make the decision about becoming (or not becoming) a teacher. College students share their volunteer experience each semester. Reflection is an important component.

Reinforcement of the lessons learned is accomplished by replaying the experience. Questions that need to be answered throughout the experience are determination of the goal to be accomplished as well as its purpose and worthiness. It is also important to determine what the student is to learn and how to assess if the student did learn it. The adage, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" is appropriate. It is important for the students to know what to look for as they volunteer so they will know it when they observe it. At the beginning of the semester, each student establishes goals for their volunteer

experience. Setting Goals involves students describing the educational field experience they wish to pursue, the information, facts, concepts or ideas they wish to gain, the applications of knowledge they want to develop, and the kind of attitudes or values they would like to develop or clarify. They then set three goals they wish to achieve throughout the semester. Midway through the semester, they reevaluate these goals. They may add more goals or change their initial ones at this time.

Assessing Goals includes the following: Writing an essay that examines, discusses and assesses the three goals (personal, teaching and learning) set for the field experience at the beginning of the semester. Describing the field setting in which they work and how this setting is (or is not) helping to achieve the goals set. Describe the role the volunteer plays, their responsibilities and the work they do with the students. Describe in the essay what has been done to achieve the goals. Discuss the progress made as well as successes and failures experienced. The essay should end by discussing whether or not the initial goals were achieved and why they think they have been able or not able to do so.

If they have achieved their goals, they need to set three new goals that they would like to work on for the rest of their field experience. If they have not achieved them, they need to discuss how they plan to go about achieving them by the end of their field experience.

At this time the supervising teacher will also assess the students' work by answering the following questions. 1.) Briefly describe the extent to which you have become acquainted with the student and the contact you have had with him or her. 2.) Describe areas of particular strength you observed in your contact with the student. 3.) Describe areas of weakness or areas for suggested growth.

At the end of the semester, the students will review their goals again by completing the following assignment. 1.) Compose an essay that reviews your progress towards the goals that you set at midterm. Describe, in detail, the growth you have gone through since the beginning of your field experience. Contrast your initial impressions, experiences and goals with your ending impressions, experiences and goals. 2.) Assess the goals you set at the beginning of the semester and at midterm with the goals that you think you should be working on next. Your assessment should clearly state the goals and discuss specifically what you think has changed and needs changing. 3.) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your field experience. How could you improve the weaknesses that you identified? 4.) In closing, include any observations about the progress you have made in developing an understanding of schooling, teaching and learning.

At the end of the semester the Supervisor's Final Evaluation includes answers to the following questions:

1.) Briefly describe through your observation the student's progress from the beginning of the semester to the end. Consider his/her rapport with students and other school personnel.

2.) Describe any suggested areas of growth for the student. The students also evaluate their

field placement by answering the following questions: 1.) What activities and duties were you responsible for in your field setting? 2.) How did your field experience help you? What knowledge and skills have you learned that will improve your communication and professional skills?

3.) What did you like the best or least about your experience? Would you recommend the setting to another student? Give your reasons and provide examples.

Students offer many thoughts at the end of each semester. Some of their final quotes and comments reveal much about their experiences during the school semester.

“As a teacher’s assistant I have learned that each student brings a new challenge that must be faced uniquely.”

“I felt my volunteer experience was a privilege not an obligation this past semester.”

“The more time I spent in my volunteer classrooms, the more I saw the textbook and class lectures in action.”

“This field experience was the highlight of my semester. I learned more in this field experience for real life application than in any of my classes in college.”

“The area was full of shacks and old buildings. I was working with a whole different student than what I had thought. I left the first day broken-hearted imagining the unstable environments those students live in.”

“This class, along with my volunteering experience, have shown me the realities of teaching. I still feel motivated to be the best teacher I can be.”

“The joy that comes from watching a child be excited to learn is indescribable. All I can say is that I am not ready to let go and will continue to volunteer next semester.”

Life Skills

The secondary goal is to help the students realize that through their time commitment, they will positively impact a child’s life. They will hopefully learn many life skills. Good character, like good soup, is made best at home. But, to be successful in life and on the job, sometimes, students need to acquire life skills as well as academic training while in college. Here are a few characteristics that, in our view, are especially critical characteristics to help people be successful at work or at home.

Reliability

A few summers ago a friend of ours was a baseball coach for ten to twelve year old boys. Midway through the season three of them quit the team because the weather was too hot.

It is difficult to believe that parents would allow these young boys to abandon their teammates by not honoring their commitment. If the lesson they learn is quitting is an option when things get tough, what will happen someday in high school when algebra, for example, is difficult to understand? What will happen a few years later in college when one of them chooses a major that is rigorous and requires a great deal of time? Will he drop out of college or just change his major to something easier that will cost him thousands of dollars in lost earning potential? What will happen someday if one of these young boys has problems in his marriage or has difficulty paying his bills if quitting is always an option? These are realistic questions that point out that some college students need help developing characteristics that will help them lead successful lives. It is our contention that faculty and staff can help in this regard by virtue of the things they say and do and by how much they get interested in the lives of students on our campus.

â€|Dependability

Just showing up is the first step toward being successful on the job and in life. As ordinary consumers we know, for example, that it is often hard to get a repairman to come to our house when he says he will. Itâ€™s hard to get the car repaired by the time weâ€™re told it will be ready. Likewise, itâ€™s often hard to get students to come to class or hand in their assignments on time. Regardless of the difficulty involved in getting students to be dependable, we need to help them for their own sake down the road of life. College is a practice training ground. Itâ€™s a lot less serious for students to make mistakes in college and learn from them, with help from us, than it will be in the real world someday making those same mistakes. Faculty and staff should take the initiative when necessary to help students be as good as their word, to do what they say they will do, to be where they say they will be.

â€|Loyalty

Loyalty is a good thing. Certainly, the future employers of our students will appreciate it if they are committed to the organization and the job. Sometimes, however, there will be disagreement but this is not necessarily disloyalty. Those who, in the best interest of the organization, disagree, should be listened to. Our students will find that leaders are suspect of those who always agree with them and actually appreciate good input. We can demonstrate this reality in our classrooms and in other interactions with students.

â€|Courage

After graduation and in the workplace, young men and women will find that they must have the fortitude to carry out assignments and the gallantry to accept the risks of leadership. It wonâ€™t do them any good to balk at the sight of obstacles or wilt in the face of challenge and adversity. They will need to rise to the occasion just as they did in college if they are to survive and prosper in a job environment or difficult situation in their personal life. We have found that our students appreciate it when we weave comments about this into our class discussions.

â€| Desire

Lots of people aspire to positions of leadership but few of them will attain it without a strong personal desire to influencing people, processes, and outcomes. Those who want to be leaders must know a lot about leadership and the costs associated with such positions. By what we say and do, as leaders on campus we can provide insight about what is required to be a leader worth following.

â€| Empathy

All of us need to develop an appreciation for and an understanding of the values, troubles, and feelings of others. Life is easier when we have some understanding or sensitivity for other cultures, beliefs and traditions. Empathy, however, should not be confused with sympathy, which may result in unwise consolation when a person ought to pay the consequences for poor decisions. Faculty and administrators need to know about empathy so they can work effectively with students and the myriad variables that distract them. By way of a good attitude and a helpful spirit, anybody on campus can help students be more empathetic toward others.

Students, and all the rest of us, need to get out of comfort zones and take an interest in others. We need to get out and about to share our concerns, see how people are doing, and ask what we can do to be of help. People who can put themselves in the place of others, who really understand them, are good at making friends. This is critical to success in college, on the job, and at home. In fact, over sixty years ago Dale Carnegie in his classic book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, said: "In our interpersonal relations we should never forget that all our associates are human beings and hunger for appreciation. It is the legal tender that all souls enjoy. Try leaving a friendly trail of little sparks of gratitude on your daily trips. You will be surprised how they will set small flames of friendship that will be rose beacons on your next visit" (Carnegie, 1981, p. 59).

We do hunger for appreciation. In fact, we all want the same things. We want to feel welcome. We want to be understood. We want to feel important. We want to be able to trust people. Leaving a friendly trail as Carnegie suggests is a very good idea. In fact, it's similar to one presented in the scriptures. We have to sow before we can harvest. This is not a trendy new approach to building relationships. It is a proven technique made necessary by the difficulty involved and time required to develop relationships that bring positive results. As faculty and staff on campus, we can get involved in the lives of students and encourage them to find someone who needs help, an encouraging word, or a friend.

â€| Credibility

Just like the rest of us, students sometimes make poor decisions. It's a shame when people make decisions they soon regret, especially those that impact one's reputation. Credibility, like one's reputation, usually takes a fair amount of time to establish but only a fleeting moment to tarnish or destroy completely. Credibility is like an icicle because once it's gone it's gone. All of us in higher education know this so we need to

conduct ourselves in a manner that enhances our credibility. This helps sustain us and provides a good example for students who are watching and listening. This reality is something to keep in mind in or out of the classroom.

â€¦Tenacity

The quality of unyielding drive to accomplish tasks in college or in a work environment is a desirable quality for leaders or those who follow leaders. Those without tenacity persist only when things go their way. Those with tenacity persist and pursue in spite of discouragement, deception, abandonment, lack of money, lack of opportunities, or any other variable. We tell our students that they should not let others cause them to failâ€¦no excuses. Tenacity, as much as intelligence, is often the key to earning a college degree, maintaining relationships, succeeding on the job, and dealing with lifeâ€™s challenges. As administrators and faculty we can state this plainly or show it through our attitude and action. Students benefit when we do this.

â€¦Stewardship

We should have a caretaker quality of stewardship for the resources we have been entrusted with as faculty or staff. We should spend money, care for equipment, and manage resources as if they were our own. When we do, those we work with, including students, will notice. In our academic environments we ought to serve in a way that encourages trust, respect, and confidence.

â€¦Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the engine of success. It is displayed in the surge of your will, the spark in your eye, the tone of your voice, the grip of your handshake. With it you can do almost anything. Without it there are only alibis. On your campus do you do things with all your might? Do you do your best all the time? Are you active, energetic, enthusiastic, and faithful to the tasks before you? Do you appreciate the privilege of having a job? Students notice all these things and whether or not you are â€¦into it.â€™

â€¦Smile

Your expression is just as important as the clothes you wear. Greet everyone with a smile and salutation and youâ€™ll be a person people want to be around. Students will notice this and want to be just like you. Itâ€™s also helpful to remember that courtesy is the shortest distance between two people. Students notice this too.

Summary

College students must acquire knowledge and technical skills in order to be successful at work. In addition to these skills, they need to develop people skills so that they can be successful at work, and at home. With this in mind, faculty and staff should consider how decisions, actions, and words affect students and realize that as adults, they are in positions

to impact lives, not unlike parents, They should hold the conviction that helping students develop knowledge, refine character, and develop values is one important goal of education. This is especially true for people who work predominately with students. "The profession of student affairs needs to move beyond mere discussion of ethical codes into the application of these codes to daily work" (Buchanan 1996, p. 7). More specifically, Brown (1985) states, "The common mission of the student services profession is being the moral conscience of the campus" (p.83). According to his perspective, it is our responsibility to consider the impact of college on the character of students. Character development of students is very important. Those who can and will speak to students about it provide help that matters. Henry Adams stated, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops" (Albom, 1997, p. 79).

A few years ago in response to an embarrassing fraternity incident on another campus, the president of a major university stated that universities are turning out "highly skilled barbarians." He went on to say that the biggest downfall in higher education today is that college staff and faculty fail to expose students to values and "don't provide a value framework to young people who more and more are searching for it." Our notion is that there ought to be an obligation to provide a complete education that encourages potential, creates intellectual capacity, conveys the power of knowledge, and refines the wisdom needed to know what to concentrate on.

Faculty and staff can have a significant impact on the development of students. Therefore, we should have a refined notion regarding what constitutes good educational practice and realize that we can be models of behavior. Referring to the impact of faculty on students, Cantor (1992) states, "Learners will watch the way you conduct yourself in the classroom and in the Laboratory. They will keenly observe your mannerisms, speech, teaching style, and personal habits. The behavior model that an instructor provides will live long after he or she leaves. Therefore the legacy must be as constructive and positive as possible" (p.3). What we say, how we say it, and the programs we offer to help students develop character are so important because they impact the lives of students. Encouraging students to consider their own character and consider others so they can be more caring citizens is part of what higher education should be about. Education and character development should go hand in hand because they provide resources to improve the human condition. It's a good idea, once in a while, to stop and think about what we are doing to help students and how we can do more.

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