# A Report Card for Christian College Student Affairs

David S. Guthrie
*Geneva College*

# A Report Card for Christian College Student Affairs

By David S. Guthrie, Ph.D.

## Introduction

I am deeply honored to be writing an essay for the inaugural issue of the ACSD Journal. Over the last two decades, I am convinced that the scope, expertise, and stature of Christian college student affairs has expanded and matured due, at least in part, to the efforts of the Association for Christians in Student Development. This new journal portends yet another ACSD-related initiative to support and encourage what is already underway, namely, helping Christian student affairs practitioners to understand and to enact their tasks in ways that honor Jesus Christ. To the extent that this essay and the responses to it (including the ones included in this issue) may further this cause, *soli dei gloria*.

In this essay, I attempt to evaluate what might be called "Christian college student affairs." While I affirm that Christians can, do, and should work in institutional settings that do not function with Christian mission statements, I focus this essay on the student affairs operations of Christian colleges. I do so for pragmatic reasons alone, not the least of which is that the vast majority of ACSD members are employees of Christian colleges. Thus, I thought it most instructive to address my comments to Christian student affairs professionals at Christian colleges.

With a term such as "report card" in the title, it may be reasonable to believe

*David S. Guthrie, Ph.D. is the Director of the Master of Arts in Higher Education Program at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.*

that I "pass out grades" in the pages that follow. I don't. I am certain that such an approach would be wrongheaded from the start, particularly since I have no data, I have no direct experience with the student affairs efforts of virtually every Christian college, and I have not held a position in student affairs for four years! Rather, I use the seven "Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs" (1999) as possible "subjects" around which Christian college student affairs practitioners might pursue a thoughtful evaluation of their respective programs. Stated another way, in the same way that a fifth grader's report card might include subjects such as reading, mathematics, history, and the like, I submit the seven principles as the subjects for which "good" practice in student affairs -- including the student affairs practices of Christian colleges -- may be judged. Although I include my own brief, impressionistic remarks regarding the efforts of Christian college student affairs on each of the seven principles, I am most interested in urging Christian college student affairs programs to utilize the seven principles to conduct their own evaluative analyses.

## Seven Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs

The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) appointed a study group almost five years ago for the purpose of developing a statement that would define the contours of effective student affairs programs. In March 1998, the study group's work entitled "Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs" was adopted as a joint statement by ACPA and NASPA. One year later, the study group published a book -- *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999) -- that offered further explanation of each of the seven principles of good practice.

This essay highlights the seven principles of good practice in student affairs as they were discussed in this very insightful book. More specifically, I briefly discuss each principle below, followed by my own reflections regarding Christian college student affairs vis-à-vis each of the principles of good practice. As I stated earlier, my hope is that this essay will encourage Christian college student affairs personnel to evaluate their respective programs based on appropriate interpretations of the seven principles of good practice. As such, the seven principles function as the "subjects" for which we should not only assign "grades" based on thoughtful analysis, but about which new practices should be developed and existing practices modified intentionally. To the extent that purchasing and perusing *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999) may be useful to these ends, I encourage readers to do that as well.

**Principle One: Good practice in student affairs engages students in active learning.**

The first principle highlights at least two important aspects of student affairs professionals' work. First, it must be engaging. This suggests that student affairs personnel anticipate, create and plan for opportunities for students to learn particular things. In contrast to a "whatever happens" approach, the implication of an engaging

approach is that student affairs practitioners have various outcomes in mind towards which they desire students to make progress. In addition, "engag[ing] students" implies an eager desire and subsequent, intentional efforts to help students "get it," or not to miss something important, or to "see it" a different way. In contrast to a serendipity approach (e.g., "they'll find me if they need me"), the nature of an engaging approach is that student affairs professionals are proactive in helping students become more self-conscious about and interested in making sense of all that is happening.

Second, this principle clearly articulates the purpose of student affairs personnel: helping students to become and to be active learners. I suspect that this is no longer a novel idea. NASPA (1987), ACPA (1994), and Kuh, Lyons, Miller, & Trow (1994), to name several, have all made similar arguments. However, in her elaboration of the first principle, Baxter Magolda (1999) effectively utilizes Kegan's (1994) bridge metaphor in making a case for active learning. The bridge metaphor refers to a process by which linkages are developed among students and educators. Educators must understand "where the bridge begins [for students] and help students take the journey to the other side" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 24). Likewise, students must acknowledge that educators have purposes in mind for what and how they will learn. Active learning or bridge-building, then, is the ongoing project in which educators acknowledge and respect students' current understandings yet challenge them to develop new understandings, behaviors, and attitudes. Needless to say, "challenge and support" metaphors (such as Kegan's bridge metaphor) are quite familiar to student affairs professionals. In fact, Baxter Magolda intimates that student affairs practitioners have an integral role to play in supporting and enhancing an institution's commitment to active learning simply because "situating learning in students' experience . . . , validating students as knowers . . . , [and] mutually constructing meaning" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 26-27) have long been standard modes of operation in their work.

### Principle Two: Good practice in student affairs helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards.

This principle has unequivocal support at Christian colleges. In fact, many would effectively argue that developing coherent values and ethical standards is a distinctive characteristic of Christian colleges and universities, particularly in relation to large, public universities. A recent study supports such a claim, concluding that "the campus culture of religious institutions provide a setting in which character-enhancing activities are valued . . . ," especially when compared to other types of institutions (Astin & Antonio, 2000, p. 6).

Although this perception may be generally true, the conversation must not end with "the comparison." Rather, Christian student affairs personnel must strive to define the particular values and ethical standards that they wish to see developed in students, clarify the reasons why these values and standards are worthy of pursuit, and labor to create innovative and useful means of seeing such values and standards come to fruition in students. In character-building terms, Christian college student affairs personnel must articulate what they mean by character (rather than tacitly believing that

everyone simply means the same thing when they use the word), why their resolve is to work towards cultivating it within students, and how they will do so.

Jon Dalton's (1999) chapter elucidating this principle offers some good advice in this regard. He offers an educational framework consisting of five, interrelated strategies to foster the development of coherent values and ethical standards: transmission, clarification, moral reasoning, moral commitment, and moral action. Christian college student affairs administrators are still obliged to identify the specific content of these strategies (e.g., What should be transmitted and how? What beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and so on must be clarified and how? How are the contours of moral reasoning from a Christian point of view and how can these skills be generated in students?), but they do provide an excellent grid for shaping good practice. Dalton also posits an ambitious list of activities and practices that may be instrumental in creating campus climates in which values and standards are best enhanced:

1. A mission statement that articulates core values and virtues
2. A general education curriculum that includes core values and virtues as educational outcomes.
3. An academic honor code
4. A student conduct code that defines student rights, duties, and responsible citizenship
5. A student compact, creed, or statement that articulates the institution's core values and virtues and that students are expected to affirm as part of their membership in the campus community
6. Formal incentives and structured opportunities for community service and community-building activities
7. A campus ethos of welcoming and caring for students
8. New student programs that orient and introduce new students to campus resources, traditions, core values, role models, and help establish friendships and affiliation with the institution
9. Campus governance structures that provide for active student participation and responsibility
10. Consistent role-modeling by university leaders to affirm the core values and virtues of the institution
11. A visible and effective program of rewards and recognition for exemplary students who model core values and virtues
12. Recognition and support for students' spiritual and religious expression and development
13. Structured opportunities on campus for public discussion and debate about values and moral issues (Dalton, 1999, p. 65-66).

**Principle Three: Good practice in student affairs sets and communicates high expectations for learning.**

Most would agree that high expectations can be motivational and affirming. Within the field of American higher education, various reports (Chickering & Gamson,

1987; Education Commission of the States, 1995; The Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993) champion the importance of establishing and communicating ambitious expectations. In the student affairs context, one of the ways this occurs is through "giving [students] responsibility" (Blimling & Whitt, 1999a, p. 16). On one hand, student affairs staff must use wisdom in selecting the students in whom great trust and responsibility will be given; not just any student will do. On the other hand, "setting the bar high motivates people to achieve their potential and surpass their self-perceived limits" (Kuh, 1999, p. 67). More specifically, Kuh suggests that student affairs practitioners utilize a five-fold agenda to make progress towards good practice in the area of high expectations:

1. Determine what the institution wants to expect of its students.
2. Discover what expectations for student performance the institution actually communicates.
3. Examine gaps between the expectations that institution desires and those that are actually implemented.
4. Develop strategies for addressing gaps between desired institutional expectations and student performance.
5. Cultivate an ethos of learning (Kuh, 1999, p. 78-89).

**Principle Four: Good practice in student affairs uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.**
In the midst of responding to the unexpected and/or putting out fires figuratively or literally, many student affairs professionals are doing well simply to pursue some of what they hoped to accomplish at the beginning of the academic year. Good practice, however, necessitates that student affairs professionals build in feedback mechanisms that will supply them with timely and constructive information. In turn, good practice suggests that this information not only is collected, but used to consider improvement in student learning. Blimling and Whitt say it clearly:

It is difficult to manage what you cannot measure. If student affairs is in the business of student learning, it should be engaged in trying to measure what contributes positively to that process and what interferes with it (1999a, p.17).

Pascarella and Whitt (1999, p. 108-111) provide the following recommendations for student affairs staff who are interested in pursuing good practice in this regard: 1) Develop an "ethos of inquiry" with the student affairs organization; 2) Commit resources to systematic inquiry; 3) Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for assessment of student learning and the role of student affairs in that learning; 4) Designate responsibility for student affairs inquiry; and 5) Start somewhere. In short, if student affairs practitioners desire to fashion themselves as experts on students, they must commit themselves to the ongoing task of gathering feedback about students and their environments. Moreover, their efforts in contributing to the improvement of students' learning experiences in and out of the classroom will be enriched to the extent

that they use acquired data to modify existing programs and create responsive ones.

**Principle Five: Good practice in student affairs uses resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.**

Since stewardship is a word that makes sense within a Christian worldview, this principle is one with which Christian college student affairs professionals will easily resonate. At its heart it concerns making wise decision about expenditures. More specifically, good practice requires that student affairs practitioners spend monies in ways that correspond with institutional and departmental priorities. Not only should all of the initiatives undertaken by a student affairs division make sense within the institution's educational agenda, but its most important or central initiatives should command the most attention from a fiscal point of view. Conversely, programs that are not as essential to institutional and divisional priorities should be reflected as such in the budgeting process.

In addition to responsible and sensible fiscal management, Reisser and Roper (1999) suggest that other considerations are essential in the effort to use resources appropriately. For example, they suggest that resources will be utilized best when student affairs leadership clearly understands institutional and divisional culture; articulates a clear vision and goals for the division; communicates often and meaningfully with colleagues; implements regular planning and evaluation procedures; takes risks as a matter of course; portrays a sense of urgency in the tasks at hand; demands competence among divisional comrades and stresses the ongoing growth of the college and its constituents. In short, Reisser and Roper (1999, p. 116) argue that student affairs leadership has the "dual challenge of being effective, responsible managers while also functioning as inspired, visionary leaders in the achievement of [their] institutional missions."

**Principle Six: Good practice in student affairs forges educational partnerships that advance student learning.**

Although collaboration is generally assumed to mean something positive, it is also fair to say that it does not seem to occur effortlessly among the participants of colleges and universities. Blimling and Whitt (1999 a, p. 18), with partial tongue-in-cheek, offer that it may be "remarkable" that collaboration occurs at all! The difficulties in accomplishing it notwithstanding, good practice in student affairs necessitates that student affairs staff members seek partnerships with their colleagues elsewhere in the institution, particularly with academic administrators and faculty members. I have argued this point elsewhere as follows:

> . . . Student affairs practitioners and faculty members should not only communicate regularly regarding their respective efforts, but should also plan and enact learning initiatives -- both in-class and out-of-class -- conjointly, involve each other in consulting and strategizing, collaborate on research projects pertinent to student learning, and exhort one another to do their work. . . on behalf of students (Guthrie, 1997 b, p. 72).

After Schroeder (1999) identifies several potential obstacles to collaboration, he offers some examples of successful educational partnerships that can bring together student affairs and academic affairs operations. These include: Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs); restructuring student governments into learning communities; service learning partnerships; collaborative planning conferences; cross-functional curricula; and summer institute programs. All of these, as explained by Schroeder, are examples of programs that attempt to forge partnerships across existing boundaries. They point to the leadership role that student affairs professionals can and should have in the reform of undergraduate education as well. And yet, there appears to be considerably more room for efforts in this regard, to the end that Terenzini's and Pascarella's challenge may be enjoined:

> If undergraduate education is to be enhanced, faculty members, joined by academic and student affairs administrators, must devise ways to deliver undergraduate education that are as comprehensive and integrated as the ways that students actually learn. A whole new mindset is needed to capitalize on the interrelatedness of the in-and out-of-class influences on student learning and the functional interconnectedness of academic and student affairs divisions (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994, p. 32).

**Principle Seven: Good practice in student affairs builds supportive and inclusive communities.**
Community is a word often used by those within the walls of academe to describe "life on campus." Needless to say, community means different things to different people, including those who are constituents of colleges and universities. At the very least, and given current realities, community often refers to a campus environment that is hospitable to its participants and promotes values such as civility, honesty, and comfortability. One wonders, however, whether campus size is a prerequisite to achieve community effectively. Perhaps this is why Blimling and Whitt (1999a, p. 19) are willing to say that "Smaller, private, particularly religiously affiliated, colleges usually have a much easier time of defining exactly what they mean by community and exactly how they hope to fulfill it."
The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) offered more specific ideas regarding the characteristics of community that colleges should embrace:

- A purposeful community, where faculty and students share intellectual goals and values
- An open community, where freedom of expression is protected but which has a civility that respects the dignity of all
- A just community with a commitment to heterogeneity and diverse opportunities in the curriculum and social activities, and an honoring of the individual person

25

- A disciplined community in which the individuals are guided by standards of conduct for academic and social behavior and governance procedures that work for the benefit of all
- A caring community that supports individual well-being through positive relationships, sensitivity, and service to others
- A celebrative community, which unites the campus through rituals that affirm both tradition and change and instill a sense of belonging.

More recently, Brazzell and Reisser (1999, p. 161) offer an "inventory" of strong and weak communities that is instructive for measuring progress as well as setting standards:

| STRONG COMMUNITIES | WEAK COMMUNITIES |
|---|---|
| Plan ways to welcome, orient, and invite involvement | Provide minimal information; hope newcomers will adapt |
| Generate a climate of pride, excitement, and enjoyment | Tolerate a climate of apathy, disengagement, and stress |
| Offer a variety of activities with good attendance | Offer few activities, or generally have low attendance |
| Students easily find groups where they can feel comfortable | Students feel alone or marginalized |
| Diversity is visible | Population looks homogeneous |
| Individual differences are respected; equality prevails | Inequality, stereotyping, or discrimination exists |
| Open discussion of controversial issues is valued | There are few forums for debates or differing opinions |
| Socially responsible behavior is modeled, promoted, and reinforced | Irresponsible actions are overlooked; little emphasis on service or ethics |
| Accomplishments are publically honored | Little recognition is provided |
| A sense of community is explicitly valued and promoted | No intentional strategies are used to reinforce a sense of belonging and pride |
| Morale and self-esteem are high | Cynicism, hostility, and dissatisfaction recur |

Both of these lists provide helpful insight into the kind of community that student affairs practitioners work towards cultivating and sustaining. Although neither is intended to be exhaustive and neither can account for all of the variables that characterize institutional distinctives, they provide a provocative grid from which to discuss the extent to which community is valued on campus.

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to recap, albeit briefly, the principles of good practice for student affairs that are highlighted in Blimling's and Whitt's important book. I even spent some time describing more particular features of each principle in the interest of helping Christian college student affairs professionals do some preliminary reflection about the extent to which they currently pursue good practice (as defined by ACPA/NASPA). I do not mean to suggest that Christian college student affairs should adopt these seven principles willy-nilly, nor do I believe that Christian college student affairs leaders would be ill-advised to consider additional (or substitute) principles of good practice that have specific relevance to the Christian higher education context. Rather, I simply wanted to provide several baselines for good practice that are widely accepted within the larger profession and about which I think it wise to consider as potential benchmarks.

In the next section, I offer my impressions regarding how Christian college student affairs personnel are "doing" vis-à-vis the seven principles. Let me reiterate that what follows are my impressions. They are prone to error based on the limitations that I mentioned at the outset of the essay. However, to the extent that they evidence a reflection on the principles just summarized, I hope that it will spur on my colleagues at Christian institutions to engage in similar reflections of how they are currently "doing" in relation to the seven principles.

I think it is important to mention one additional limitation before I proceed with my impressions. What follows are generalizations. Generalizations, by definition, downplay specificity. As a result, I miss the variations in student affairs practices that exist among Christian colleges. Stated more explicitly, some Christian college student affairs offices do better on a particular principle than other Christian college student affairs offices. Rather than allowing this reality to become a source of self-righteousness or despair, however, may I suggest that it be used as a starting point for constructive engagement. For example, would it be possible for an ACSD conference to be framed around "exemplary practices" on each of the seven principles of good practice in student affairs? Or, would it be possible for the new ACSD Journal or the existing *Koinonia* publication to include regular features on noteworthy examples on each of the seven principles of good practice? In either case, I am interested in improving collaboration and collegiality among Christian college student affairs professionals, to the end that current good practices do not remain under bushels and, simultaneously, that those practitioners who desire insight and improvement will receive them.

How We Are Doing: My Impressions

**Regarding Principle One (Engages students in active learning) AND Principle Three (Sets and communicates high expectations for student learning).**
My impression is that Christian college student affairs practitioners, on the one hand, have made important strides towards these principles. In the interest of connecting with the larger educational goals of their respective institutions, it appears that many Christian college student affairs programs have thoughtfully revamped orientation programs, career counseling initiatives, disciplinary models, and student activity programs. In addition, more and more Christian college student affairs departments are playing a key role in developing theme floors, Freshman Interest Groups (FIGs), service-learning programs, and leadership experiences (not the least of which are ones that include a classroom component).
On the other hand, I believe that most would agree that room for improvement exists. My impression is that Christian college student affairs programs are still wrestling with what it means to undertake their efforts under the banner of student learning. Ministry approaches to the profession, which probably should not be abandoned completely, are difficult to concede. "Fun and games" initiatives -- which also should not be completely eliminated -- are usually easier to implement. And, given the demands of the job, it continues to be tempting simply to take care of the daily issues than to conceive an effort that is linked to the educational outcomes of the institution. The pressures to do otherwise notwithstanding, I continue to believe firmly that:

> . . . Student learning must be the purpose around which student affairs staff construct and implement their efforts. Residence life programs, student organizations and activities, disciplinary proceedings, orientation programs, volunteer projects -- in short, all those initiatives typically administered by student affairs professionals -- must have student learning as their goal (Guthrie, 1997 a, p. 40).

**Regarding Principle Two (Helps student develop coherent values and ethical standards).**
My impression is that Christian college student affairs professionals have viewed this as a fundamental and necessary aspect of their work for many years. Behavioral contracts, dorm bible studies, honor codes, chapel programs, community-living policies, developmental disciplinary procedures, and various other initiatives that emphasize and encourage morality and character are virtually synonymous with the Christian college experience and most frequently occur under the auspices of student affairs departments.
While it is apparent that Christian college student affairs staff view this principle as a defining characteristic of their work, the actual impact in the lives of students is less clear. What are the particular values and ethical standards that Christian college students are developing as a result of the efforts of Christian college student affairs

practitioners? What are Christian college student affairs professionals doing to effect such development? How do the "results" in this regard and/or the strategies that produced them differ, if at all, from what occurs on non-Christian college campuses? To what extent should they?

The good news is that there are data that may help to address these questions. Both the Collaborative Assessment Project and the Quality Retention Project (both conducted in collaboration with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities) generated relevant data -- and much of it! The not-so-good news is that many Christian college student affairs offices do not collect or analyze information that may help them to assess their efforts in this or other regards. Christian college student affairs staff should place significant emphasis on this particular principle. Simply stating a commitment, however, is insufficient. Christian college student affairs professionals must also develop appropriate strategies and programs that give practical expression to their commitments and, at the same time, assess their efforts to monitor the extent to which their efforts are effective.

**Regarding Principle Four (Uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance).**

My impression is that Christian college student affairs practitioners have substantial room for improvement regarding this principle. The reason may be attributable to the relative slowness with which Christian colleges in general have embraced the outcomes assessment movement. The dearth of activity among Christian college student affairs programs in assessing their efforts may be a byproduct of the sparse activity among Christian colleges in outcomes assessment in general.

I am not suggesting that Christian college student affairs departments (or Christian colleges) do not conduct evaluations of any kind. Clearly, many departments collect evaluative feedback on residence life, orientation, counseling, and service learning programs. What is missing in many cases, however, is data that indicates that students are making progress towards the intended outcomes that Christian college student affairs practitioners desire, and around which they have based all of their initiatives. And, data may not be the only thing that is missing. Some -- maybe many -- Christian college student affairs departments are functioning without a mission/vision statement or clear objectives/outcomes. Likewise, some -- maybe many -- Christian college student affairs departments have not considered the roles that they should play in the larger learning efforts of the college.

If true, perhaps my impressions provide some direction for the efforts of Christian college student affairs programs in the future. If they do not exist already, develop a compelling mission/vision statement and construct several outcomes statements that correspond with the institution's mission and culture, and that will focus the nature of all of the department's work. Then, conduct an audit of departmental efforts to determine how what you are currently doing matches with your intentions for students' learning. Deleting or modifying existing programs may be necessary; creating new programs may be advisable, too. In either case, the goal is to develop initiatives, interventions, and programs that complement the mission of the institution and, at the

same time, make sense given the stated mission and outcomes of the student affairs department. Finally, ongoing systematic inquiry provides a way of examining the extent to which departmental initiatives, interventions, and programs are helping students make progress towards the department's intended outcomes. The relatively recent book, *Assessment in Student Affairs* (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996) may be a useful tool in making progress towards this principle of good practice.

**Regarding Principle Five (Uses resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals).**
My impression is that Christian college student affairs professionals do well with respect to this principle. As I stated earlier in the essay, Christian college student affairs staff professionals are interested in stewardship as a matter of course. Although some may not be excellent budget officers and most may not have the expertise of the chief financial administrator, I believe that Christian college student affairs practitioners attempt to use resources wisely as a matter of personal and professional faithfulness.

Another aspect of this principle, however, is contributing visionary institutional leadership. In this way, Principle Five overlaps with **Principle Six (Forges educational partnerships that advance student learning).** My impression is that some Christian college student affairs staff are more gifted than others in this regard. That is, some are more cognizant than others about the ways in which the efforts of student affairs practitioners contribute to student learning. Some are more predisposed to develop thoughtfully collaborative programs with others within the institution. And, some are more concerned and articulate about other dimensions of institutional life including curricular issues, admissions policies, faculty hiring procedures, strategic planning processes, and development campaigns. While it is true that roles and contributions differ from institution to institution, I believe that Christian college student affairs professionals must redouble their efforts to resist the temptation to "do their own thing," as if the larger institution is incidental to their work. Christian institutions will improve to the extent that departments -- including student affairs departments -- see their work to help students learn in conjunction with rather than in isolation from other aspects of institutional life.

**Regarding Principle Seven (Builds supportive and inclusive communities).**
My impression is mixed with respect to the efforts of Christian college student affairs professionals in reference to this principle. On one hand, many of the characteristics of community mentioned earlier in the essay seem to be true of Christian colleges in general and of the efforts of Christian college student affairs staff in particular. Many would agree that Christian colleges are among the most purposeful communities in postsecondary education. Likewise, few would argue with the assertion that Christian college student affairs professionals embrace an ethic of caring and concern for students.

On the other hand, I am aware that some view Christian colleges as hostile to

"alternative" viewpoints (i.e., ones other than the viewpoint of the particular institution). And, at times, perhaps such a view is warranted. To what extent are Christian college student affairs professionals helping students to develop a spirit of civility? An awareness and appreciation of other views? An understanding that different may not equate with wrong? An acknowledging that, this side of the Christ's return, all is not known? I am not necessarily suggesting that Christian college student affairs practitioners are doing poorly with respect to this principle. I simply want to draw attention to the idea that, at times, the enclave character of Christian institutions can hinder the necessary, faithful attention to viewing people and ideas with the respect and courtesy due those made in God's image (McMinn, 1998).

## Conclusion

I began this essay by acknowledging that Christian college student affairs professionals have made important strides in understanding and enacting their work during the last two decades. Let me conclude by stating the obvious. More is yet to be done. Student learning must be more central in framing departmental efforts; the *telos* of student learning must be articulated more clearly; mission and outcomes statements must be drafted and revised; greater harmony between programs and intended outcomes must be achieved; more and better insight into institutional issues must be cultivated; an insightful and convincing institutional voice must be better trained; collaboration efforts must be diligently pursued; the evaluation and assessment of departmental efforts must become commonplace and instrumental in making improvements and the list goes on. My interest in reviewing *Good Practice in Student Affairs* in this essay is an effort to provide a resource towards making progress in at least some of these areas.

More is yet to be done to understand the contours of a [Christian] faith-informed student affairs profession and practice as critical. The last 20 years have taught Christian college student affairs practitioners that they cannot ignore or reject the theories, statements, and practices that emerge from the larger profession and make some sense from a Christian point of view. Conversely, Christian college student affairs staff have also learned during this time that uncritically baptizing the larger world of professional theory and practice as gospel truth is not a vocationally faithful response. The future of the Association for Christians in Student Development must take shape around helping student affairs personnel -- Christian and otherwise -- understand and navigate these issues more thoroughly.

Departmental discussions around *Good Practice in Student Affairs* may be a good place to engage further discussions in this regard. How does each of the seven principles resonate with a Christian view of student affairs? How does each of the seven principles distort a Christian view of student affairs? What are appropriate and inappropriate applications of each of the seven principles, given a Christian view of reality? Are there other principles of good practice that should be added based on a Christian view of reality? If so, what would they be? These are some of the questions that could frame departmental discussions.

In closing, I thought it would be useful to rely on *Good Practice in Student Affairs* one more time. The final chapter of the book briefly offers 17 strategies for implementing the seven principles of good practice. Although these strategies should be modified based on particular institutional objectives and cultures and evaluated from a Christian point of view, I believe they provide helpful tips for making progress towards improving the efforts of Christian college student affairs professionals:

1. Employ ongoing assessment of student outcomes.
2. Communicate institutional values and expectations through policies, decsions, processes, and interactions.
3. Link the classroom with out-of-classroom activities.
4. Provide high-quality services and programs that support student learning.
5. Establish coherent purposes and learning outcomes appropriate to the backgrounds and aspirations of students and consistent with the institution's mission.
6. Communicate to students what is expected of them.
7. Develop in students a sense of belonging, community, pride, and loyalty to the institution.
8. Encourage student involvement.
9. Value diversity, accept differences among students, and work to overcome prejudice on campus.
10. Involve students in institutional governance, policies, and decisions.
11. Promote civility on campus.
12. Create formal and informal opportunities to engage faculty, staff, and students in ways that contribute to the greater good of the institution.
13. Develop a student-centered focus.
14. Create flexible networks of resources.
15. Use a systemic approach.
16. Increase the intellectual content of student affairs activities.
17. Create an ethic of caring (Blimling & Whitt, 1999, 181-190).

## References

American College Personnel Association. (1994). The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs. Washington, DC: Author.

Astin, H. S. & Antonio, A. L. (2000). Building character in college. About Campus, 5(5) 3-7.

Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1999). Engaging students in active learning. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 21-43). San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 21-43.

Blimling, G. S. & Whitt, E. J. (1999 a). Identifying the principles that guide

student affairs practice. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 1-20). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Blimling, G. S. & Whitt, E. J. (1999 b). Using principles to improve practice. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates, Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 179-204). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Blimling, G. S., Whitt, E. J. & Associates. (1999). Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Brazzell, J. C. & Reisser, L. (1999). Creating inclusive communities. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates, Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 157-177.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1990). Campus life: In search of community. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chickering, A. W. & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. AAHE Bulletin, 39(7), 3-7.

Dalton, J. C. (1999). Helping student develop coherent values and ethical standards. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 45-66). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Education Commission of the States. (1995). Making quality count in undergraduate education. Denver, CO: Author.

Guthrie, D. S. (1997 a). Student learning and student affairs. In D. S. Guthrie (Ed.). Student affairs reconsidered: A Christian view of the profession and its contexts (pp. 39-63). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Guthrie, D. S. (1997 b). Christian higher education and Christian student affairs. In D.S. Guthrie (Ed.). Student affairs reconsidered: A Christian view of the profession and its contexts (pp. 65-77). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Kegan, R. (1994). In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kuh, G. D. (1999). Setting the bar high to promote student learning. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 67-89). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Lyons, J., Miller, T., & Trow, J. (1994). Reasonable expectations: Renewing the educational compact between institutions and students. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

McMinn, L. G. (1998). Enclave adaptation, multiculturalism and evangelical Christian colleges. Research on Christian Higher Education. Grantham, PA: Messiah College.

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (1987). A perspective on student affairs. Washington, DC: Author.

Pascarella, E. T. & Whitt, E. J. (1999). Using systematic inquiry to improve performance. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 91-111.

Reisser, L. & Roper, L. D. (1999). Using resources to achieve institutional missions and goals. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 113-131). San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 113-131.

Schroeder, C. C. (1999). Forging educational partnerships that advance student learning. In G. Blimling, E. Whitt & Associates. Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning (pp. 133-156). San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 133-156.

Terenzini, P. T. & Pascarella, E. T. (1994). Living with myths: Undergraduate education in America, Change, 26 (January/February), 28-32.

Upcraft, M. L. & Schuh, J. H. (1996). Assessment in student affairs: A guide for practitioners. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Wingspread Group on Higher Education. (1993). An American imperative: Higher expectations for higher education. Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation.