

## Great Best Practices: Teaching Students Policies and Procedures

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Jim Collins, in his #1 best selling book *Good to Great* (2001), acknowledges that great organizations have developed “a culture of discipline.” His research indicates that successful organizations have built “a culture around the idea of freedom and responsibility. . .” In fact, Collins quotes Viktor E. Frankel (*Man's Search for Meaning*) who advocates the following:

*Freedom is only part of the story and half the truth . . . That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast (p. 120).*

Building discipline involves students learning how to balance their rights with their responsibilities. We, as student conduct administrators, for years have understood the importance of discipline in the academy. Many offices of student conduct contain the title of RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES. Bickel and Lake (*The Rights and Responsibilities of the Modern University*, 1999) advocate a shared responsibility between the college and its students and their parents. Therefore, if the development of a disciplined community is a goal we profess, then what responsibilities do we assume? As judicial administrators, we recognize that we have multiple duties to our students. But one duty stands at the forefront and is a cornerstone to our profession. That duty is to educate and to specifically educate students about their rights and responsibilities both on and off the campus.

In my 25 years in student conduct I have adopted two basic philosophies in educating students. They are:

- ✓ One size does not fit all? and,
- ✓ One shot at education does not “fix” the student for 4+ years.

**One Size Does Not Fit All:** Learning theory acknowledges that students learn in different ways. Some students learn best by reading, some best by visual means, and others through simulations. Recent studies have also indicated that the millennium generation student learns and favors use of technology. They gravitate toward electronic means (e.g. e-mail and websites). Therefore, multiple educational methodologies are the key to reaching and educating our students.

The implication is that the student conduct administrator must be familiar with different educational modalities. Further, the conduct office should take a leadership role in educating those who develop programs around the rights and responsibilities of students (e.g. resident hall, student activity, and orientation staffs).

**No One Shot Methods:** Borrowing from learning theory, we know that students learn by repeated exposure to content. That's why good professors encourage and even organize student study groups and hold review sessions before major exams. We too can learn from our academic colleagues. On your campus, curriculum in a given academic department is probably organized this way: 1) an academic major is developed through a set of well coordinated courses, 2) courses are sequential in nature, 3) important concepts are repeated in several courses, and 4) learning takes place across the curriculum.

Can student conduct educators organize in a similar way? Arthur Chickering and other Student Affairs theorists teach us that students develop in stages. What may be an appropriate learning strategy or program for a senior may not be worthwhile for a first year student or vice versa. What may be appropriate for men may not be appropriate for women. Remember, "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus." A well coordinated learning program that is sequential in nature, focused repeatedly on important campus issues of rights and responsibilities, technology-inclusive, and takes place across all Student Affairs functional units, will serve students better than several individuals independently attempting to educate.

### **Target Groups**

Before we jump into specific ideas and methodologies, it is important to consider if it is necessary to target certain groups for education. You know your campus best. However, two groups that I believe every institution should consider developing target programs for are: first year students and parents of first generation students.

Most retention studies show that if a college does not reach a first year student within the first four to six weeks of the school year, that student is likely to drop out or transfer. Similarly, schools that fail to address rights and responsibilities within the first four to six weeks may be at the mercy of other subcultures that, through example and tradition, teach destructive behaviors. Policy and procedure education can be accomplished through a well coordinated orientation program and other programs offered early in the school year. This timing is essential to teach values and to get the Millennial generation student involved. The Millennial student is also likely to retain strong bonds with their home. Research (Northwestern Mutual, 2001) indicates that their top two heroes are mom and dad. These students will maintain a close home and family relationship while attending college. Therefore, parents will play a key and important role in the campus lives of their children.

In general terms, parents who are college graduates understand the academy, its structure, and how it functions. Specifically, they understand--many through personal experiences--how student conduct systems operate. However, parents of first generation students often do not have the experience necessary to advise their son or daughter. Student conduct systems are foreign to them and many can't fully appreciate the structure, rules, and regulations of such a system. For these parents education is essential. Other groups such as athletes, members of resident hall councils, and fraternities and sororities can be

effective student groups to reach with a well coordinated educational program. Below is a list of ideas and specific suggestions that have been collected from colleagues and personal experiences.

### **First Year Seminar Courses**

Many colleges offer first year experience (FYE) courses. The structure of Concordia's FYE program has been useful in teaching students their rights and responsibilities. First, every FYE course is taught by Student Affairs staff or faculty. We have a long tradition of Student Affairs staff involved in the program. Each instructor is charged with finding a co-instructor who is a student. Within established guidelines, this pair formulates specific learning objectives and experiences for their course. Most instructors choose to teach the student code of conduct and focus on the rights and responsibilities student have. In classroom discussion, having a student instructor facilitates identification of the student point of view. Many FYE instructors request that the Office of Student Conduct make presentations either to a specific class or to several classes at one time. We are more than happy to comply and have delivered several types of programs that students have found useful.

**Guest Appearances:** Instructors often invite Student Affairs staff to outline the services offered by their department. For those who work in student conduct, it is an opportunity to see the administrator in a different and positive light. Frequently these guest speakers focus on rights and responsibilities and how they affect the lives and education of students. As an example, our Campus Safety Office discusses services available to secure the safety of students (e.g. escort service to vehicle in parking lot).

**Simulation:** Student Conduct Staff have found that students are very interested in what goes on in a Student Conduct Board hearing. Therefore, we have developed a "typical" alcohol violation scenario. The actors (accused students, RA's, and hearing board) are selected from members of the class. The guest conduct administrator instructs the actors on their role and chairs the hearing board. Usually the board reaches a responsible decision and discussion follows on the implication of that decision (sanctions, appeals, etc.). This also presents the opportunity to discuss unique policies and procedures. Many students do not understand why we have some rules. With the two classroom instructors and the conduct administrator present, a wide perspective can be presented and discussed.

**Personal Testimony:** At times you may be able to find a student who has been a victim and is willing to educate other students. Several years ago, we had a student who was out driving with her fiancé. They had just left the fiancé's campus (grad school) and were hit head on by a drunk driver. She was critically injured and her fiancé was killed. After her recovery and return to campus, she wanted to tell her story to others. Her plea not to drink and drive made a greater impact on students than any faculty or staff could have ever made.

### **Student Groups**

As mentioned before, targeting and educating student groups raises awareness and can have a direct impact on all members of the group and those the group influences. West Virginia University has a number of programs organized through the Division of Student Affairs and has made a commitment to educate on alcohol and drug abuse. A fraternity and sorority pledge orientation class is required of all pledges. The class is coordinated with their FYE course and includes an alcohol education component. University Health Services sponsors an alcohol education course for student leaders targeting individuals in student organizations. Policies and procedures are a part of the program.

Also, WVU has their athletes sign a “no-substance abuse” contract and athletes are subject to random drug testing during the school year. When Concordia instituted a similar program for athletes, the Athletic Department focused on a three step education process: 1) During the summer all athletes and parents were informed in writing that random testing would occur the next year. All rules and procedures for the testing were made clear including suspension from the program following a positive test result. 2) In the fall, a meeting was held to ensure that all athletes understood the policy and how the sampling would occur. 3) The National Center for Drug Free Sports was the vendor of choice for the testing (the center conducts the NCAA drug testing program). As a part of this meeting, a representative from Drug Free Sports conducted a substance abuse education program. This meeting was held behind closed doors (no coaches and administrators) so that athletes could speak freely and ask potentially embarrassing questions.

Steven Clark of Virginia Tech (McCarthy) also advocates mandatory education for specific groups. These programs are better served if conducted over “a long duration and impose substantial penalties for missing a session” (p. 13). He recommends the following in educating student groups: focus programs on risk factors, target the values of the peer group, and focus on the perceptions of social norms.

### **Print Material**

Posters, pamphlets, and flyers quite often get lost in the mountain of material colleges send, post, and pass on to students. Many of these find their way unread into trash cans or littered about the campus. However, some of our colleagues have found creative ways to get students to keep and even read the print material.

Rockhurst University (KS) has developed a very clever brochure which uses cartoon figures to teach some of their rules and procedures. Different scenarios are played out for the reader in classic comic book fashion. Using this method, students can see a “typical” or frequent violation and how the staff would deal with the violation.

Another excellent way to educate on alcohol policies comes from the Campus Alcohol Strategies Sourcebook and is called the Six Pack Project. Before students arrive in the fall, a six pack of root beer is placed in the resident hall rooms of underage students. A flyer is placed with the six pack explaining that this is only six pack of beer that can be consumed in this room or residence hall. The school’s alcohol policy is also explained in

this flyer. Local soft drink bottlers may provide the root beer free for the advertisement and publicity.

### **Simulations**

Simulating violations is an excellent way to teach policy and procedures and the consequences of an individual's behaviors and choices.

Edgewood College (WI) focuses on sexual misconduct in their new student orientation program. Lecture and static presentations are out and real life situations are in. They have developed a PowerPoint presentation on the essential issues, policies, and procedures. Interspersed within the presentation are student skits on specific points of policy and procedure. This way the audience takes the content (policy) and visually sees how it plays out in real life situations.

A date rape trial has been used by many colleges for years. In this simulation the student body is invited to attend a trial for an alleged date rape on campus. Before the program begins, 12 students are selected to serve on the jury. They are ushered from the venue and the date rape "play" is shown to the remaining audience. Students play the actors in the date rape scenario. Following the incident, the jury is lead back into the venue (courtroom) and the trial begins. The role of the judge, district attorney, and defense attorney are played by community people serving in those respective positions. It has been my experience that the attorneys like the experience and are willing to do it pro bono.

Following the trial, the jury retires to deliberate. During this time, the attorneys and a campus conduct officer answer questions about school policy and the law. This is where the real education happens. When the jury reaches a decision, it is announced to the audience. Question from the audience can also be directed to the jury. Another opportunity to educate.

### **Online and Electronic Media**

A study by Northwestern Mutual (2001) found that 99% of Millennial generation students have access to the Internet compared with 65% of the national population. Students averaged about one hour per day (6 hours/week) of Internet use in 1997. This rose to over 11 hours a week in Northwestern's 2001 study and probably far exceeds 11 hours/week today. It is no secret to IT departments that students spend a great deal of time on line. Technology is the name of the game for this generation.

Therefore, the University of Virginia has produced a CD-ROM version of their conduct code titled "On My Honor." The CD explains that it is designed to provide UVa. students with in-depth information. In producing this CD, the University has used some very creative ways to teach students about their system.

The CD begins with an introduction by Melissa Stark who is an alumnae and does TV sideline reporting of NFL football games. She gives a personal endorsement of the UVa. honor code system and gives several examples of how it served her as an undergrad student. It is a great “attention getter” and motivates the viewer to investigate further. The presentation then gives students 3 choices: 1) view the process, 2) take a quiz on the rules and procedures, and 3) view additional links to other informational sources. The CD concludes with a message from Al Groh, the University head football coach, who supports the honor code system.

### **Student Affairs Departments**

The Department of Public Safety at West Virginia University has created a Jeopardy style program which is used in their residence halls. The contestants answer questions on alcohol and drug abuse, general crime related matters, and the consequences to these adverse behaviors. The residents compete for prizes against each other.

Educate by doing. Indiana State University (McCarthy) takes the pleasure and thrill out of pulling false fire alarms. They do it by forming a rapid response team. This team can be made up of resident hall staff, members of RHA, or the like. When a fire alarm is pulled the rapid response team immediately goes into action. If the team doesn't smell smoke or see fire, the alarm is deactivated and residents are asked to return to their rooms. The disruption is minimal and the fun is gone.

### **In Conclusion**

The above are only a few of the creative ways colleges and universities have found to reach students concerning their rights and responsibilities. I began this article with a quote from Jim Collins (Good to Great, 2001) and I would like to end in the same manner. The first sentence of Chapter 1 of Collin's book is: “Good is the enemy of great” (p. 1). By that he means that many organizations strive to excel and thus reach the status of good. Then it becomes easy to become complacent with that level instead of striving to become great. My hope is that the creativity shown above will motivate all of us to use - GREAT BEST PRACTICES.

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Rockhurst College. <http://www.rockhurst.edu/studentlife/stdtbook/pubs.asp> (click on “Know the Code”)

West Virginia University. [www.wvu.edu/~studaff/alcohol/education.html](http://www.wvu.edu/~studaff/alcohol/education.html)

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