

The Musings of a Conduct Officer



The Little Book of Restorative Justice

Decision Making: From a Dream to Reality

By smo17 On May 3, 2015 · [Add Comment](#)

Decision-making is a process that most people do not actively think about on a regular basis. When I first came to Penn State in Residence Life, I had the opportunity to facilitate a decision-making workshop for students who violated the code of conduct. Working with the workshop provided a wonderful opportunity to actually be able to stop and reflect on decision-making and how that factors into our behaviors.

The original workshop was disjointed. I talked about ethics in an abstract manner that confused students and facilitators alike. Having facilitated the workshop numerous times that first year, I worked on a committee that would overhaul the program and create a flow that would more accurately focus on the purpose of the workshop.

With this change, I pushed for a change in philosophy. We always call the workshop a “Decision Making Workshop.” And when we talk to students, many coordinators say that the student made a bad or poor decision. But the question I have is who are we to tell a student they made a bad decision and assigning them to a workshop on decision-making gives a connotation that we think they made a poor decision and need to attend a workshop to learn to make better decisions.

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So with that in mind, the first thing that I really wanted to focus on with the workshop is a student's VALUES. How does a person know if they made a bad decision if they do not know what is important to them?

A person takes in many different things through their senses. These things enter into their brain and are all informed by their values, their beliefs, their memories and experiences and come out as decisions which reflect a student's behaviors. With that, giving the student the chance to reflect on their values is one of the most important steps in discussing and talking about values.

Ethics are standards or rules that institutions or people put into place to govern values. For instance, in society we value life so one of our ethical standards, rules or laws is not to kill another person.

In essence, the code of conduct is a list of ethical standards that Penn State has put in place to govern Penn State's specific values.

Therefore in conversations with students all the time, I encounter a time when our student's values do not align with Penn State's values, especially around marijuana.

In these conversations with students, instead of telling them they made a bad decision or a poor decision, I can say that the student made a decision in which their actions did not reflect Penn State's values. I think that this is a more positive message, especially because I do not feel that it is our job to tell students what they should believe or value but allow them to discern for themselves what is important to them. In many cases, students will say, I do not see anything wrong in smoking marijuana. With that I can say, you are right, this may not be against your values, but as a member of the Penn State community you pledge to uphold Penn State's values. And if you do not agree with or believe in Penn State's values, you can choose to make whatever decision you choose to make, but just keep in mind that violating the ethical standards (the code) that governs Penn State's values ultimately has consequences (sanctions).

So the workshop allows students to discern their values, explore their ethics, and allows them to look at the decisions they made and alternative decisions they could have made to avoid violating the code of conduct.

I am very proud of the work that the committee has put into developing the workshop and making it interactive for the students.

When I first started at Penn State, there were two workshops for decision-making, one facilitated by Residence Life and one facilitated by the Office of Student Conduct.

During my internship with Student Conduct, I got to attend their decision-making workshop. I am honored to see that the first part of their workshop is basically an exact replica of the workshop that the residence life committee created.

The residence life workshop is a 2-hour workshop. The OSC workshop is also 2 hours but is broken down into two 1-hour sessions. Having seen the OSC workshop, I really like portions of the workshop that have been included into the setup.

The students are given the chance to reflect on their decisions from the first portion of the workshop to the second workshop. They are also asked to publicly speak on what brought them to the workshop.

One thing that I have noticed is the student's willingness to talk about what brought them to the workshop and the level of learning that every student can take away from hearing other student's stories.

Conducting the assessment for the residence life workshop, many students want to talk about what brought them there or talk about other situations that could violate the code of conduct.

I think it is ultimately the mission of both departments to combine the workshop so that both residence life and student conduct are facilitating the same workshop and teaching the same message. I think that this year there were huge strides in combining the workshops and I am excited and pleased to know that I had a part in that and I am looking forward to future conversations on how we can collaborate between both departments to bring together a workshop that adequately address our students needs.

I also think that the workshop has a lot of room to grow. I think that the workshop can focus more on the “P.R.I.D.E.” decision-making process, especially because Penn State is full of pride. I think that we could also incorporate more about bystander intervention, as that is becoming a bigger buzzword on campus. And lastly, I think that the program can really focus on the community because anytime there is wrongdoing done, it can be tied back into the community and how the community was affected.

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