Shaun O'Malley

Think about all of the decisions you have ever made in your lifetime. Did you ever make a decision you regret? We all make decisions every day. Some decisions are beneficial to us, some decisions are detrimental to us, but at the end of the day, we have a responsibility to make decisions based upon the information we have and how we feel about the course of action in front of us. The business of making decisions is very subjective; it is based upon our thoughts, our beliefs, our viewpoints of the world, and the role we play in it.

Working in higher education over the past 15 years, I have had the opportunity to meet with students during some of their most vulnerable moments to discuss the decisions they have made, decisions which led to their meeting with me. We always view the conduct process in a college setting as an educational opportunity to connect with a student, have a deep conversation about the student's actions, and hope that the experience will ultimately change the way the student acts in the future if presented with the same situation. "The fundamental purpose of student conduct work is to promote growth and development in students while protecting the interests of the larger campus community" (Lancaster & Waryold, 2008, p. 8). "Students are empowered through counseling and/or helping skills to gain a greater self-understanding, which in turn leads to accepting responsibility for their actions and changes in their behavior (8). Sometimes the process works and sometimes it does not.

While I was working at a large, Level 1, public, research land-grant institution, the Senior Associate Director of Residence Life once asked, "Who wants to serve on a committee to facilitate a decision-making workshop for students who violate minor infractions of the code of conduct?" With that question, I found myself immersed in the world of decision making and conduct. At the first meeting, I thought I was going to be

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trained on how to facilitate this workshop; instead, the Senior Associate Director gave us a folder with about 20 activities in it and told us to choose five that would make up this workshop.

We carefully selected five activities and—BOOM—we had ourselves a workshop. After a year of conducting the workshop to over 300 students, we noticed the assessment data were not so good. Students made comments such as, "The activities were childish/or set us up for failure," "the workshop did not really flow together smoothly or cohesively," "the workshop did not really connect to or highlight the reasons why I was assigned to attend the workshop" and "Haven't you ever made a decision that you regretted later?   What makes you an expert on decision making and qualified to tell me what I should or should not do."

These powerful comments were reoccurring themes from the qualitative data we collected from the students about the workshop. A new workshop, grounded in theory, built around practice, would better meet the needs of the students, to address the above concerns, and provide a stronger opportunity for students to examine their decisions and how their decisions affect their future.

The department has also just started the process of creating a residential curriculum and creating an educational priority to govern all the learning the department wants students to gain from living on campus. "A curricular approach allows student affairs educators to clarify what students should have the opportunity to learn in their time beyond the classroom and how students can best achieve this learning" (Kerr, et al., 2020, p. 30). "A curriculum is an articulation of broad learning goals refined and further articulated by student learning outcomes and a comprehensive, intentional and developmentally sequenced student engagement and delivery plan. This plan provides

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focus, clarity and a process for continuously improving design and implementation through assessment" (30).

Zimmer and Keiper (X) demonstrated how to redesign an entire sports management curriculum using an action research model and a curriculum redesign framework. Sagor and Williams (2017) explained, "Collaborative action research is a systematic, collaborative, and self-initiated research process that is conducted by and for teams of practitioners" (as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. X). With that, can collaborative action research be utilized to redevelop or redesign this decision-making workshop through the lens of a curricular approach?

The collaborative insider action research needs to examine 1) the purpose of this workshop, i.e., what outcomes we hope students get from attending this workshop (and how they align with the educational priority of the department); 2) what learning strategies meet the outcomes of the workshop (so the activities do not seem childish or set the participant up for failure); 3) the positionality of the facilitators/administrators administering/assigning the workshop (so we are not just judging or serving as "experts"); 4) how to connect theory to practice by focusing on the "best methods" for educating students about decision making in a college environment, i.e., what topics are conducive to a smooth and cohesive workshop); 5) assessment tools for monitoring whether or not the new workshop is successful in accomplishing its mission (continual improvement and measure of success on the program); and 6) how to create an inclusive environment so everyone assigned to the workshop can feel like they belong and can participate.

One comment from the original workshop's assessment has continued to haunt me—the comment about being a decision-making expert. None of the facilitators ever claimed to be an expert on decision making, but the comment resonated with me for a

number of reasons. Students perceived us as authoritarian rule makers who thought we were too smug for our own good. Who are any of us to tell a student that they made a poor, wrong, or bad decision, especially if we do not know the entire story of the situation? "Effective practice also requires administrators to think carefully about creating a safe environment in which students are encouraged to talk about and explore the issues that challenge their life and threaten their success in college" (Lancaster and Waryold, 8). It is hard to create or foster a safe environment for students to discuss their actions if they feel they are being judged by the student affairs practitioner who is supposed to help them examine the decision that brought them to the conduct process. Why is it okay for a College or practitioner to judge a student based upon a decision that student made? Our goal is not to tell the student what they should value or what is important, but to encourage the student to examine their decisions, learn from those decisions, and make different decisions in the future based upon their previous experiences. We should not judge the student based upon their decision because at some point or another we all have made a decision that we later regretted.

This workshop needs a new model that removes facilitator bias and opinion and instead encourages the student to examine their values, what is important to them, and how their decisions either support or detract from those values and what future effect those decisions can have on the student and the values for which they want to be known.

The whole nature of decision making is subjective, but the practitioner must have a "willingness to stand at the intersection of conflicting value and emotions and, with fortitude, attempt to reconcile those differences through the application of a particular institution's values and standards of conduct. Good practitioners find such conflict interesting and learn not to take such difference or conflict personally" (Fisher and

Maatman, 26). Furthermore, "the practitioner must be predisposed to see difference and conflict as a place where education can occur, and to see such challenges as a healthy part of the change and growth process" (26). "Such a toleration of ambiguity and suspension of judgement requires intentionality in ensuring that an individual is treated with fairness, dignity, and respect, regardless of the alleged infraction or the outcome" (27).

Quality interventions between faculty and staff who genuinely care about and show concern for students have major impacts on college students' lives. Astin et al. (X) have all published countless articles showing that one of the single most important factors that promotes student persistence, degree completion, and satisfaction is their interactions with faculty/staff (Dublon, pp. 35–36). "To dialogue with students in a teacher-student/ student-teacher paradigm can truly be transformative for the student, the conduct officer and the conduct process (Lopez-Phillips & Trageser, 2008, p. 128). Therefore, if we can get this workshop right, the implications for students' future, their decision making, and the conduct process could be extremely powerful.

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