

Shaun O'Malley

Professional Development Plan

HI ED 801

I have worked in the realm of Higher Education Student Affairs for 13 years and I have realized over these 13 years that I am more a practitioner than an academic. I thrive on the opportunities that I have working with students on a day-to-day basis to make sure that they have the tools and resources to be successful. With that being said, the world is never black and white and there are many times when the academic realm of higher education merges with the practical side of the job I do. In my 4 years working at Penn State University and in my time in the HI ED Master's program, I have realized the importance of assessment and institutional research on the work that I do every day as well as where I need to do more to develop my understanding of assessment and institutional research.

I eventually want to be a Vice President and Dean of Students at an institution of Higher Education. In this position, it will be vital for me to understand assessment so that I can analyze assessment data on various programs, opportunities, and offerings under the student affairs umbrella. Being able to recognize what assessment tools exist, how to conduct such assessment, and the important questions to ask to get the necessary answers to these questions will be important for me to be able to make informed decisions to benefit students. Having a stronger understanding of assessment allows for a deeper understanding of the student body which ensures adequate knowledge to make informed learning outcomes for the student body, allows for strategic and financial planning based upon student needs and institutional goals and most importantly sets up a

culture of improvement (Harper, Yin, Trainer, Christensen). Assessment, as Volkwein states, summative assessment allows for the pragmatic (external accountability to constituents) as well as the formative assessment that allows for the inspirational (self-improvement) (Volkwein, 2009).

Pat Terenzini wrote an article outlining several intelligences that are necessary to truly understand institutional research (Terenzini, 1993). These intelligences are technical/analytical, issues and contextual (1993). The first major intelligence is technical/analytical. Though I do not specifically want to enter into the field of Institutional Research for a career, having the knowledge and competency to conduct data gathering assessment, understand the methods used to gather the data and to read and examine other institutional researchers data to utilize that to make decisions, developing in this area is necessary. To further develop in this area, I would most likely benefit the most by taking several statistic courses to get a better feeling for and understanding of importance of data analysis such as regression analysis, t-tests, anovas, that are taught in classes like STAT500 and STAT501. I took HI ED 840 over the summer, and one thing I learned the most about was that I do not have a strong knowledge of data collection and analysis.

The second major intelligence is issues intelligence. It is in this area where all Higher Education officials need to be aware of. Recognizing what issues are important to higher education and what contributes to those issues are extremely important so all higher education officials should remain up to date on the field. For instance, understanding that changing demographics in high school students and that less high school students are expected to graduate over the next few years are going to have major

impacts to enrollment numbers across the country. This was an important issue at Penn State this year so Penn State recruited more in international communities and Penn State's international community jumped from around 9% to 14%. Staying current on these issues and trends and understanding what impacts those trends can have on the community is important to assessment. How has the increase of international students by 5% impacted the community, need of resources, etc? The best way to stay up to date in this area is to be well read on the important literature coming out of the higher education community and its professional organizations. Also joining certain committees, taking certain classes and participating in discussions around issues important to higher education can all be beneficial to gaining and sustaining sound knowledge on issues.

The last intelligence is contextual. This really develops from talking to people in your field and from the institution to understand trends in your field as well as how the institution responds. Talking to the decision makers, taking on internships and experiences in the field.

To further my professional development, I plan on choosing 1 topic each month and doing research on the topic. Reading the current trends and current articles on it as well as talking to at least 1 professional in the field on the topic to generate a better understanding of the topic and the outcomes related to that topic.

Terenzini, Patrick. "On the Natural of Institutional Research and the Knowledge and Skills it Requires." *Research in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1007/bf00991859.

Volkwein, J.F. *Accreditation, Accountability and Performance. Assessing Student Outcomes: Why, Who, What, How? Assessment Supplement. New Directions for Institutional Research*, Winter, 2009. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass. 2010. 9780470878774. Ch. 1. pp. 3-12. Retrieved from: <https://reserve-libraries-psu-edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/hied/801/80102.pdf>