

RUNNING HEAD: REFLECTION

Reflection:
Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference
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The 18th Annual Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference took place October 12-14, 2008 in Burlington, Vermont. The conference is sponsored by the University of Vermont's College of Education and Social Services, the American College Personnel Association, Association for Student Judicial Affairs, and University Risk Management and Insurance Association. Those in attendance represented numerous universities and colleges across the nation. From graduate students to Associate Vice Presidents, the conference offered seminars and discussion groups that provided learning opportunities for all.

This was the first time I attended the Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference. Though I attended this conference as an assignment for my Legal and Ethical Issues in Student Affairs class at Azusa Pacific University, this conference is one that I would attend again and would recommend to professionals and other graduate students in the field of student affairs.

The conference was jam packed with sessions, discussion groups and social networking opportunities. There were three parts of the conference that were the highlights of my experience: the Stalking Behavior in College Students session, the session on Honor Codes, and the social networking opportunity on the second evening of the conference. Both the stalking and honor code sessions really held my attention and I have found myself talking about both of them to other graduate students in my classes upon my return.

The Stalking Behavior in College Students session provided a lot of practical information about the behavioral profile of various types of stalkers and the likelihood that different categories of stalkers will respond to confrontation with cessation of action

or violence. This session was a highlight of the conference because of the wealth of information I obtained (as will be discussed below). After attending the session I felt better prepared to educate students about stalking and to also assist students who find themselves the victim of a stalker.

The honor code session was intriguing to me because it was focused on the creation of an honor code at the University of Maryland, (in the early 1990's) and how the university has approached integrating the honor code into the framework of the school. This session caught my attention mainly because I was not expecting to be interested in the subject matter, surprisingly I found that honor codes are a concept I would actually like to research more in depth and discover how they change the climate of an institution.

The third highlight of the conference was one of the social networking opportunities at the conference. On the second evening of the conference I had the opportunity to meet student affairs professionals and several graduate students. The graduate students were from the University of Vermont and are enrolled in a student affairs Master's Degree program similar to the one at Azusa Pacific University. The networking opportunity was a highlight for me because I was able to compare and contrast similar Master's Degree programs and know for a fact that for what I hope to do and who I am, Azusa Pacific University is exactly where I need to be. From my conversations it seemed that other programs are strictly based on research, which is very important; whereas, Azusa Pacific's program is based more on the relational side of student affairs.

Every session at the conference was an opportunity to obtain knowledge and that makes it difficult to write about just a few specific concepts I learned about at the conference, but here a few of the new pieces of information I obtained.

During the opening session the 2008 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act was discussed. I was unaware that such a piece of legislation existed at the federal level, I assumed there were just numerous laws made at different times that made up federal regulations for institutions of higher education. This portion of the opening session was a wealth of information. The following are a two of the things I learned from the session:

Amendments were made to the Clery Act which increase the reporting required about crimes that must be reported as hate crimes, require the development of procedures for campus-wide notification of dangerous on-campus situations, increased reporting on incidents of fire, and the required development of procedures for missing students.

College costs will be compared and those that have the highest tuition costs and largest percent increase will be placed on a list. The institutions on the list must report to the Department of Education the reasoning behind their high cost and how they plan to decrease their cost to the consumer.

The Stalking Behavior in College Students session was also a wealth of information. Here are a few of the things I learned in the session:

There is no legal definition of stalking across the board, it varies from state to state.

Over 80% of stalking incidents are not reported to campus safety officials.

Often a stalker may not be aware that they are involved in stalking behavior; they see it as the normal pursuit of a romantic relationship.

Types of Stalkers-

Rejected Type; the most common type of stalker. They seek reconciliation or revenge with a former partner. They present a high risk for threats or assault, but it is unlikely they will use a weapon. Intervention with this type of stalker is usually best done with a coordinated effort between legal and mental health resources.

Intimacy-Seeking Type; desires a relationship with their “true love.” They have a delusional belief that the victim is in love with them, the victim just is not aware of it yet. Intervention with this type of stalker tends to be difficult because discipline is seen as the price one pays for love. They may need treatment from a mental health professional and attempts should be made to encourage the stalker’s empathy for the victim (i.e. if you really love her you will set her free).

Incompetent Type; tend to be socially awkward. They attempt to court the victim even though they are aware the victim is not interested. The hope is that their continued pursuit will lead to a relationship. This type of stalker tends to end their behavior upon confrontation; they also benefit from training in social skills.

Resentful Type; feels they have been hurt and desire revenge (the person they stalk may not be the person they are seeking to pay back). They intend to scare their victim, but rarely commit acts of violence against their victim. Intervention with this type of stalker tends to include court-mandated treatment and disciplinary action tends to encourage the stalker to escalate their behavior.

Predatory Type; stalks victim to observe their vulnerabilities in hopes of finding an opportunity to fulfill a fantasy. Often the victim is unaware that they are being stalked and the attack tends to come without warning. Intervention with this type of stalker would be mandated treatment.

I also took away several pieces of information from the Making Honor Codes Work (Even if You Don't Have One) session. I enjoyed hearing about how the University of Maryland has recently (within the last 20 years) instituted an honor code and how they have integrated the code into campus culture. The university uses a modified honor code (modified from honor codes like the one at the University of Virginia) that still promotes academic integrity without single sanction expulsion. If a student is found to have broken the code, they are given a grade of XF for the course. The X can be removed from the student's record by participation in an honor code seminar one year after the incident. The modified honor code appeals to me because it promotes academic integrity yet provides room for students to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.

As a result of attending this conference there are two specific actions I am planning on taking while I am working at Azusa Pacific University. First I hope to work alongside the Office of World Missions to create an "honor code" type document for our mission trip participants. At the present time we have a covenant that applicants sign that addresses issues of expected conduct and standards of living; however, there is no mention of what the procedure or protocol is for students who break this covenant are. Though each case is different (we do have students break the covenant fairly regularly, unfortunately) it would almost seem ideal to have a process that participants could expect to encounter if they were being "investigated" for breaking the covenant. I also think it is

important that it is made known to a wider population of the student body that these individuals are agreeing to a higher standard of moral conduct so if our participants are breaking covenant, those outside our program could report it to our office. Though I would not want to promote tattle-tailing, it is very important to the work we do that those who participate in our program are held to certain standards.

Secondly, I would love to get more involved with educating the Azusa Pacific community about stalking. My involvement may simply be to bring the need for such a training to the attention of human resources and student life officials or it may be for me to actually do research and present on the topic in different settings on campus. Though I am unaware of the prevalence of stalking on this campus, it is an issue that students, staff, and faculty should all be aware of. Even presenting a simple outline, like the one that was given at the conference, about the types of stalkers and how to go about intervention, would be beneficial to many on our campus. I believe that by educating about the issue, staff and faculty would be better prepared to assist students (and other victims of stalking) in how to deal with having a stalker and students would be more informed about how to report stalking. This seminar could be put on by the Women's Center, Campus Safety, or even presented at a Faculty or Student Life In-service.

In conclusion, I am so glad I opted to do this assignment and spend the extra money to attend this conference. It was a great opportunity for me to meet a wide variety of student affairs professionals and also to learn a great deal about relevant legal issues in student affairs. I would hope that this conference will be one that I can attend in the future, so I can stay up-to-date with current issues in the legal realm of student affairs that truly do matter to the work I do with students.