



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN STUDENT SERVICES AND FACULTY

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in my office and received a phone call from a co-worker who worked in student services. As an English instructor, I had received these phone calls in the past. He called to ask why I had dropped one of his favorite students from my class. I informed him the student missed seven classes which, at that time, was 40% of the class meetings. My syllabus allowed students to miss four classes, so the student had violated the course rules.

The student and student services worker had formed a close relationship, as he was his student success advisor; and his goal was to persuade me to let his "guy" back into my class. He told me about how this student was commuting from 30 miles away, worked two jobs, and had a wife and kid. Basically, he wanted me to cut the student some slack because of his extenuating life circumstances.

I liked the student. Ironically, he was one of my favorites. When he came to class, he was polite, smart, and engaging. I desperately wanted him to succeed. Once he had missed two more classes than the syllabus allowed, the other students in the class began to notice I was not enforcing the rules that were set out in the syllabus. I had no choice but to drop him from the course.

As an English instructor at a community college, I teach six courses a semester. Each course has, on average, 20 students each. Therefore, I am responsible for 120 students learning how to read and write. Only approximately 30% know how to write well when they enroll in the class. Usually 75% of the students come to class every day, pay attention to everything I say, and work overtime to pass the course.

While student services sees one student, the faculty members see *all* the students. Student services are able to work one-on-one with students and receive the intimate details of a student's life. While, as faculty members, we get to know our students, and we always have to think about the class as a whole. Students are

able to go to their success advisor and tell their daily troubles; however, faculty have a different role. For example, if I allowed a student to miss more than the allowed classes because he or she had to work, I would have to allow every student I teach the same. The result would be mass anarchy, and attendance would be poor. Few students would be in class to receive the necessary instruction to learn the skills to pass the course.

I believe student services plays an important part in student success. In community colleges, most students are not ready for the demands of a post-secondary education. They need to have a strong support system to succeed. Student services can provide that support, but they have to work with faculty to achieve that success. The following are suggestions about how faculty and student services can work together.

Student services needs to encourage students to adhere to rules as explained in the course syllabus. Often, faculty list policies about attendance, cell phone usage, talking while others are talking, and personal conduct. These rules and policies, may not seem important to the student, but faculty know they are vital to student success. Student services workers can help faculty enforce those policies, as they see the students on a one-on-one basis. They help by reinforcing their importance.

Not every concession can be made. Faculty are responsible for students learning the content of their courses. For example, our state is beginning to assess our graduating students' writing ability. The philosophy of passing students along cannot apply to us any longer. Students must learn the content of the course.

Student services should be encouraged to have an open dialogue with faculty. Most faculty picked teaching as a career to help students. Unfortunately, at times, we cannot focus on the details of individual students' lives because we have so many students to teach. Student services should keep faculty informed. We want to help, but we need to know what is going on.

And, faculty need to keep student services informed. For example, sometimes when I am grading papers, I will notice a student needs more help than I can give. He or she needs a learning specialist or someone trained



to work with students with learning disabilities. Faculty members need to alert student services about such issues.

Student services and faculty can work together to achieve student success. Bridging the gap is possible.

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GOODBYE TO THE GREATEST COACH IN HISTORY— REMEMBERING MY BREAKFASTS WITH COACH WOODEN

June 4, 2010, was a day of inevitability. John Wooden, legendary basketball coach, passed away a few months short of a century of life. The media was filled with stories, statistics, and reminiscences of this extraordinary man. In terms of college basketball, which accomplishment would be considered the most significant? Ten NCAA championships for the University of California at Los Angeles? His induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach? UCLA winning 88 straight games? Coaching the only basketball team in history with seven back-to-back undefeated seasons in the NCAA championship games?

As a young man in Southern California, I became a UCLA basketball fan—just in time for Coach Wooden to lead the Bruins to their first national championship in 1963-64 (in his 15th year at UCLA). A few years (and several NCAA titles) later, I was a UCLA graduate student, studying geography. Being on the campus gave me the chance to see some of the basketball players. Even at a university with 25,000 students, Swen Nater, Keith (Jamaal) Wilkes, and Bill Walton were easy to spot.

I started going for breakfast with a few of my fellow grad students in the UCLA student union. One day, we were seated when Coach John Wooden came over to our table and asked: “Would you fellows mind if I joined you?” He sat down with us, introduced himself, and proceeded to ask each of us who we were and what we were studying at UCLA. We chatted for a half hour or so, and then he excused himself. My friends and I could hardly believe it. This man, at the peak of his success as a coach, had taken the time to visit with us. He was genuinely interested in each of us.

A few months later, John Wooden sat with a different group of graduate students. Again, he went around the table gathering information about the students and why they were at UCLA. I was stunned when he looked at me and said, “Larry how is your research on conservation coming?” How could he have remembered that? Before my time at UCLA was over, I had a couple of other breakfast meetings with the Coach. He knew me and every other student with whom he dined.

I began to pay even more attention to this great man. He had transcended from an athletic coach to a life coach. Ultimately, that is what Coach John Wooden really was—an amazing coach of life who happened to be the greatest basketball coach in history.

I encourage teachers, leaders, and mentors to embrace the role Coach played. For the sake of our students, we should become even better teachers of life, not just content. Coach Wooden once observed that a Seven-Point Creed, given to him by his father, Joshua, upon his graduation from grammar school, was his life plan.

- Be true to yourself.
- Make each day your masterpiece.
- Help others.
- Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
- Make friendship a fine art.
- Build a shelter against a rainy day.
- Pray for guidance, and give thanks for your blessings every day.

Lawrence G. Miller, *Chief Academic Officer*

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