

Chapter One

Student Affairs Practitioners as Helpers

Julia had been a graduate residence hall director for all of two weeks when she had her first crisis. One of Julia's residents came down during office hours and reported that her roommate was increasingly withdrawn, staying in bed, and not leaving the room for classes or meals. She had noticed in the bathroom that her roommate was taking some medicine that she thought was for depression. She was afraid to leave her roommate alone and wasn't sure how to help her. And now Julia had to decide what to do.

As the dean of students, Dr. Molina was used to dealing with difficult situations, but this one was harder than most. One of the university's most beloved student leaders had died in a car crash over the weekend, and he had spent the past forty-eight hours with some very emotional students. And now he was about to meet with the student's parents, which made him so sad just to think about. He was going to have to find a way to get through it.

Hamid had been a career counselor for many years, and he loved helping students discover their goals and wishes for their future. However, it seemed as if their stories were becoming increasingly complicated. For example, Ming was an international student from mainland China who was about to graduate

but was desperate to stay in the United States by either finding a job or going back to school. As they spoke further, it became clear that this desire had little to do with career issues. Ming was the only son of his mother, who was a single parent. She wanted him to come back home to be with her. Yet his identity as a gay man who was not out to his mother made China the last place he wanted to be.

Advising student government always had its challenges, but this year was more perplexing than most. Marisa, as the adviser of the United Student Government (USG), had noticed that there had been a lot of interpersonal drama going on, more than usual. Gloria, one of the USG vice presidents, was constantly stirring up conflict and pitting one person against another. Initially, it was happening behind the scenes, but now these conflicts were starting to play out during meetings and nothing was getting accomplished. Marisa knew that she needed to intervene but had absolutely no idea what she wanted to say or do.

Marcus was in charge of the academic support center, and it was his job to supervise the student tutors. This was a fun group of students who really enjoyed each other and liked helping others. He met with the students as a group weekly and had noticed that one of his best tutors, Harry, had been calling in sick recently and not doing his best work. One morning when Harry came in late for the second time that week, Marcus went to talk with him. Marcus couldn't help noticing that Harry seemed very hung over. Actually, when he thought about it, he realized that this was not the first time he had seen Harry come to the center that way. What was going on? How could he bring this up with Harry?

Judicial cases were never easy. Every student always had a story to tell, but this one was more troubling than most. A student, Liz, had her residence hall contract terminated after engaging in cutting behavior, which was very upsetting to her suitemates

and the women on her floor. She was seeking counseling, and her counselor determined that she was not suicidal; however, the residence hall staff felt she was creating turmoil in the hall and had therefore violated her contract. Liz was appealing this action and looking to the judicial office to resolve the conflict.

As long as there have been college and university campuses, there have been individuals who have adopted the role of caretaker, helper, and educator. Initially, that role was accomplished by faculty members who, in addition to teaching, provided advice, guidance, and supervision to college students. This was the era of *in loco parentis*, where faculty, and later on student affairs practitioners, adopted parental roles, ensuring the intellectual, social, moral, and spiritual development of their students (Fenske, 1989). Eventually, faculty members, following the model of German research institutions, began to focus more on research and teaching, leaving the out-of-classroom supervision of students to others (Evans & Reason, 2001). Fenske described faculty involvement with students as evolving from complete involvement in every aspect of students' lives to detachment.

Over time students' needs for guidance began to expand beyond the early emphasis on moral and spiritual development. The increasing diversity of the student body, through coeducation, heightened the need for more supervision of student activities (Nuss, 2003). In addition, as the world of work and career opportunities expanded, there was an increased need for experts to assist students in their nonacademic development. The overall growth in enrollment meant it was no longer possible for a president, a few support staff members (e.g., librarian, secretary, treasurer), and a small group of faculty members to run a campus (Gerda, 2006).

The diversification and expansion of colleges and universities led to a need for more resources, more coordination of services, and more specialization to address the mounting demands and concerns. This call for specialized training led to the establishment of student personnel training programs in the

early twentieth century (Evans & Reason, 2001). New positions on campuses—such as academic deans, director of admissions, and registrar—helped meet these expanding requirements and demands. Counseling, which was once faculty domain, evolved into a separate professional responsibility (Hodges, 2001). The early deans for men and women, who were primarily responsible for discipline and counseling, were the “first professional ancestors of student affairs” (Gerda, 2006, p. 151). Over the next few decades, even more professional titles and roles began to emerge in higher education—for example, vocational counselor, activities director, adviser, nurse, and counselor (Nuss, 2003). Student personnel work began to focus on expertise, specialization, and organization development, leading to the creation of campus entities to address students’ specific needs, which was a digression from the historical model of shared responsibility for student development (Roberts, 1998) first articulated by *The Student Personnel Point of View* (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1937).

Despite the various changes and configurations of the roles and responsibilities of student affairs professionals, the emphasis on the development of the whole person has not wavered. The mission of higher education has always been, at its core, to educate the whole student, not just nourish her/his intellect (Creamer, Winston, & Miller, 2001). In their review of all the major foundational writings of the student affairs profession (e.g., *The Student Personnel Point of View*, *Tomorrow’s Higher Education*, *The Student Learning Imperative*), Evans and Reason (2001) identified underlying themes that included an emphasis on the whole student in every educational endeavor, respect for individual differences, the importance of the educational environment, and responsibility to society. Further study of a wider range of professional statements and published perspectives from student affairs scholars and pioneers in Saddlemire and Rentz (1986) provide additional evidence regarding the powerful and historical emphasis on the value of holistic education.

Although student affairs professionals have always seen themselves as educators first and foremost (cf. American College Personnel Association, 1996; Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1954), that educational role, often based in out-of-classroom experiences, has included helping students deal with the emotional demands of academic life and promoting personal development (Creamer et al., 2001). According to C. Gilbert Wrenn (1951), one of the early pioneers of student affairs, student affairs professionals need to address “the basic psychological needs of all young people and the specific needs that are the direct results of the college experience” (pp. 26–27). These basic helping skills are at the core of daily interactions with students. Even as administrators’ careers advance and they spend less and less time with students, helping skills remain essential to the roles and responsibilities of all student affairs professionals (Winston, 2003).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the diverse roles that student affairs practitioners play on campus and how those roles have changed over time. Since helping is an essential part of almost every job in student affairs, this chapter identifies and describes the range of helping behaviors, roles, and responsibilities that practitioners display. This chapter addresses the competence of helping and briefly explores the helping awareness, knowledge, and skills that student affairs professionals need to be effective in their work. Specific examples of the types of helping awareness, knowledge, and skills needed across a wide range of student affairs positions are suggested here. In addition, the challenges and benefits to being a helper, as well as important training issues, are explored.

Helping as Essential for all Student Affairs Professionals

Helping, advising, and counseling skills are critical tools for student affairs practitioners whether they work in counseling-oriented positions like career counseling, leadership development

positions (e.g., student activities, Greek affairs, and residential life), administrative positions like dean of students, or academic affairs positions akin to advisement or academic support services (Reynolds, 1995b; Winston, 2003). Helping students is central to the history, goals, and responsibilities of student affairs work, and it is vital that student affairs professionals develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to assist college students with all aspects of their curricular and extracurricular lives.

Winston (2003) suggests that while most student affairs professionals are not trained as professional counselors and do not have more advanced counseling skills gained through specific academic training and supervised practice, they do need basic helping skills to do their job effectively. Using the language of Delworth and Aulepp (1976), Winston states that student affairs professionals are, in actuality, “allied professional counselors” who must use well-developed and practiced interpersonal helping knowledge and skills. Sometimes they focus those skills on their direct interactions with students, and sometimes, as their career advances and they take on broader responsibilities, they focus those helping skills on staff and faculty members as well as external constituents.

Further indication of the centrality of helping skills in the student affairs profession is found in the *Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Master’s-Level Graduate Program for Student Affairs Professionals Standards and Guidelines*, which identifies individual and group interventions as one of five core areas of study, including the following: (1) student development theory, (2) student characteristics and the effects of college on students, (3) individual and group interventions, (4) organization and administration of student affairs, and (5) assessment, evaluation, and research. This document further states that the components of the college student affairs curriculum “must include studies of techniques and methods of interviewing; helping skills; and assessing, designing, and implementing developmentally appropriate interventions with individuals and organizations”

(Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2003).

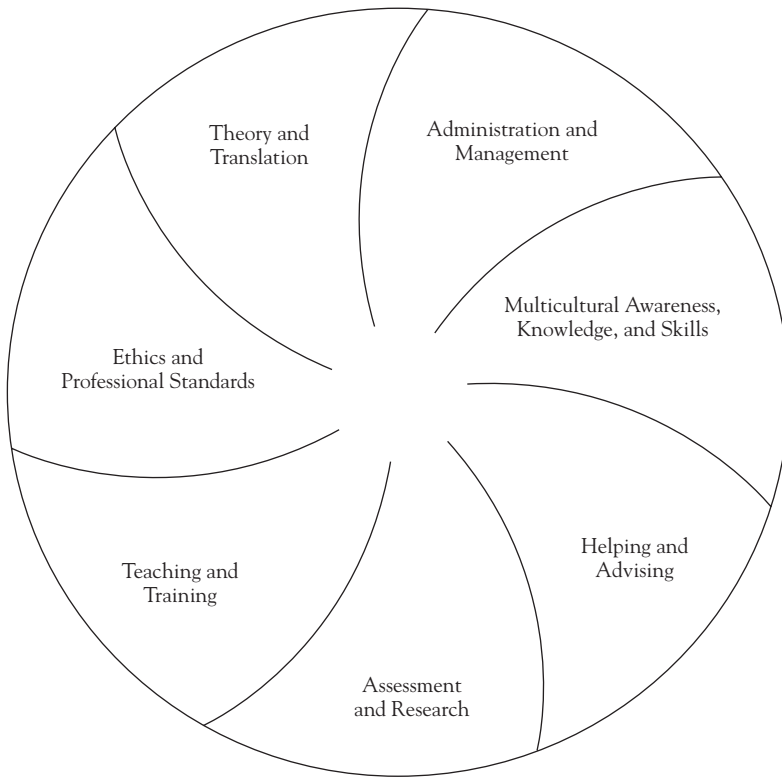
Helping as a Core Competence in Student Affairs

Understanding the core principles, beliefs, knowledge, and skills needed within the student affairs profession has been an important area of exploration and study (Lovell & Kosten, 2000). Waple (2006) and others (cf. Creamer et al., 1992; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004; Saidla, 1990; Upcraft, 1998) identified the use of a competency-based approach as a primary emphasis within student affairs preparation programs. Pope and Reynolds (1997) stated that a competence approach is needed for ethical and efficacious practice.

Many scholars have identified concrete competencies that student affairs practitioners need to be effective in their work (Creamer et al., 1992; Creamer et al., 2001; Delworth & Hanson, 1989; Komives & Woodard, 2003; Miller & Winston, 1991; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Pope et al., 2004). Some of these competencies are described across professional levels—such as entry-level, middle-management, and upper-management (Barr, 1993; Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Waple, 2006)—while others are behaviorally oriented (Creamer et al., 2001; Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Pope and Reynolds state that despite this extensive attention on competence in the field, there is little consensus about what the core competencies for student affairs practice are.

Pope et al. (2004) introduced the Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence (see Figure 1.1), which identified seven core competencies as essential to effective and ethical practice: administration and management; theory and translation; ethics and professional standards; teaching and training; assessment and research; helping and advising; and multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. While all professionals develop different levels of proficiency for the various areas, depending

Figure 1.1 Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence



Source: R. L. Pope, A. L. Reynolds, & J. M. Mueller. (2004). *Multicultural competence in student affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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on their work responsibilities and personal interests, some basic competence in all seven areas is vital for efficacious practice.

Empirical investigation of the knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics fundamental to the student affairs profession has been ongoing for almost thirty years. In a meta-analysis of twenty-three studies over a thirty-year period, Lovell and Kosten (2000) examined the skills, knowledge bases, and personal traits needed for success in student affairs across all levels of work and found that human facilitation skills, such as counseling and supervision, were crucial. Personal traits, including

working cooperatively with others and developing skills in interpersonal relationships, were also viewed as important characteristics for success.

Several recent studies (Burkard et al., 2005; Herdlein, 2004; Waple, 2006) explored the specific competencies that entry-level student affairs professionals need. Herdlein, in his survey of chief student affairs officers, determined that the most essential skills for new professionals were management skills and human relations skills, working with diverse populations, interpersonal and communication skills, caring, empathy, and firmness. Burkard et al., using the Delphi method that included a panel of midlevel and senior-level student affairs professionals, identified thirty-two competencies for entry-level practitioners. Two areas, personal qualities and human relations skills, were established as being particularly essential. Some of these specific skills identified were collaboration, teamwork/team building, training, presentation and group facilitation, counseling/active listening, advising, conflict resolution and mediation, supervision, consultation, and crisis intervention. In addition, important personal qualities that were related to helping skills included oral communication, interpersonal relations, problem-solving abilities, and assertiveness/confrontation. Waple surveyed entry-level student affairs staff to ascertain what competencies they obtained through graduate work and the extent to which they used those skills in their jobs. Effective oral and written communication and problem solving were among the skills acquired at a high level. When examining for congruence between what new professionals were taught and what they actually needed for their work, Waple identified the top areas of congruence as effective oral and written communication, multicultural awareness and knowledge, and problem solving. Other areas important to at least 50 percent of those surveyed included crisis and conflict management and advising student organizations. The only competency area related to helping that was identified as having low congruence, meaning that it was not

well developed in graduate preparation programs but was significantly used at work, was supervision of staff.

All these studies challenge how the student affairs profession is preparing and training new practitioners. According to Burkard et al. (2005), professionals are expected to have “counseling skills that extend well beyond the basic skills often taught in graduate programs” (p. 298). Introductory counseling courses typically focus on individual counseling and microskills with little attention paid to more advanced helping skills, such as conflict resolution/mediation, crisis intervention, and group facilitation. These types of skills and others—such as collaboration, consultation, and supervision—are not typically incorporated into graduate training. Increased focus on advanced helping skills is a significant change in what is expected of new professionals and may reflect students’ changing needs and demands.

The need for improved helping skills for all student affairs professionals has taken on a level of urgency in recent years as college students have struggled with significant interpersonal concerns, stress, and mental health issues (Benton & Benton, 2006b; Bishop, Gallagher, & Cohen, 2000; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004; Kitzrow, 2003; Soet & Sevig, 2006). Extensive research has documented the increased presence and severity of mental health issues that have led to disturbing levels of substance abuse, depression, suicidal and self-injurious behavior, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other serious mental health issues that profoundly affect the campus community (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Furr, Westefeld, McConnell, & Jenkins, 2001; Soet & Sevig, 2006; Wechsler et al., 2002). Although the average student affairs professional is not primarily responsible for addressing the mental health needs of college students, these issues inevitably influence every aspect of campus life. Therefore, student affairs practitioners need effective helping and interpersonal skills to understand and support students and, when necessary, refer them for counseling

and other human services. Owen, Tao, and Rodolfa (2006) suggested that student mental health issues are no longer the sole responsibility of campus professionals with the titles of *counselor* or *psychologist*. They further emphasized the need for campuses to coordinate and collaborate to address mental health issues on campus more effectively. And while there is debate within higher education regarding how much responsibility colleges and universities must assume for the emotional/mental health and well-being of students (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004), there are daily opportunities for practitioners to engage with students as helpers. To contribute to campus initiatives on mental health, substance abuse, and related issues, it is essential that student affairs professionals have well-developed helping and interpersonal skills.

Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Needed to Be a Helper

Although most student affairs professionals are not counselors and may not possess the skills, experiences, or desire necessary to provide therapy to students, they often offer support and help students with important life decisions on a daily basis. Professionals need to know how to respond to students' real emotional and personal needs and concerns because, regardless of those professionals' level of training and comfort, students often approach them with concerns and issues that require sensitivity and specific communication skills. The visibility of student affairs practitioners on campus often makes them easily accessible and approachable for students with a wide range of problems and concerns (Pope et al., 2004). Knowing when to intervene, how to be supportive, and if necessary, when to refer a student for therapy are just a few examples of the skills that student affairs practitioners need whether they work in residence life, admissions, financial aid, academic advising, or intercollegiate athletics. While specific helping skills will

be delineated and explored in later chapters, basic helping skills are briefly reviewed here.

Whether student affairs professionals are viewed as educators or helpers, they must possess important behavioral characteristics, including advising, facilitating, coaching, collaborating, supporting, counseling, motivating, managing conflict, solving problems, advocating, and transforming (Creamer et al., 2001; Rhoads & Black, 1995). Many of these behaviors are integrated into the tasks and responsibilities of student affairs practitioners across the various functional areas. According to Reynolds (1995b), some of the specific helping knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with college students across student affairs functional areas include microcounseling skills (e.g., active listening, empathy, reflection, nonverbal skills, paraphrasing), group skills (e.g., group dynamics, group processes, and leadership skills), conflict and crisis management, problem solving, confrontation, consultation, mentoring, and supervision. These basic helping skills are foundational to developing other competencies within student affairs, such as teaching and training, program development and assessment, and individual and institutional interventions. In addition, there are often interpersonal issues that need attention when implementing workshops, performing exit interviews, and responding to students in distress that require a meaningful level of competence.

As suggested by Pope et al. (2004), incorporating multicultural competence into any exploration of competence is essential. Not only does multicultural competence require a distinct type of awareness, knowledge, and skills needed for effective work in student affairs, it must be integrated into all other areas of competence. Cultural identity, diverse life experiences, and learned stereotypes and assumptions are just some of the dynamics that influence communication and, therefore, the helping process. To be effective and competent helpers, student affairs professionals must be aware of these important cultural influences and be able to apply them across the various functional areas within student affairs.

In addition to these vital helping skills, student affairs professionals need to understand what constitutes a therapeutic or affirming environment for most students. According to Pope et al. (2004), "A therapeutic climate is one in which self-exploration and growth is encouraged and a positive and affirming relationship is developed" (p. 79). Developing a working alliance is a foundational counseling construct when two or more individuals work together to resolve an important issue or concern (Meier & Davis, 1997). This alliance begins with making personal contact and building an interpersonal connection that has the potential to develop into a relationship. The basis for these relationships is empathy, understanding, sharing, encouragement, kindness, respect, warmth, and nonjudgmental acceptance (Okun, 1997). Awareness of important influences on student development, such as the significant relationships students form with staff and faculty, is vital to professionals' ability to be effective helpers.

Student development theories, which are at the core of student affairs training and professional preparation, provide an excellent foundation for understanding student growth and development. The work of Sanford (1967); Blocher (1978); Kniefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978); and others emphasizes the core developmental issue of challenge and support in our interactions with students. Providing "a proper balance of challenge and support ensures that students are challenged to do their best, yet feel supported enough to make mistakes" (Pope et al., 2004, p. 79). To be an effective helper, a student affairs professional must offer balanced and developmental interventions that truly assist students (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Illustrations of Helping Behaviors Across Functional Areas in Student Affairs

The functional areas that constitute student affairs divisions may vary significantly from campus to campus; however, it is still useful to identify some of the opportunities that various programs

and departments offer student affairs professionals to demonstrate their helping skills. The various functional areas can be grouped into the following core areas: (1) counseling-oriented positions like career and personal counseling; (2) leadership development and educational positions (e.g., student activities, Greek affairs, campus life, health and wellness, and residence life); (3) administrative positions like dean of students, judicial affairs, and admissions; and (4) academic affairs positions (e.g., advisement and academic support services).

Within the counseling area, the primary focus of the work is helping students address their personal, social, and vocational concerns. This can entail individual counseling, therapeutic and psychoeducational groups, and workshops. All these interventions require a wide range of helping skills, such as micro-counseling, teaching, workshop design and delivery, and group intervention skills. Helping can involve assisting students who are struggling with relationship issues, self-esteem, mental health concerns like depression or anxiety, academic and career uncertainty, and overall self-exploration.

Leadership development and educational positions require a wide range of helping skills in both individual and group domains. Group advisement, leadership training, supervision of peer helpers and leaders, and mentoring are just some of the interventions common to these positions. Helping skills are needed for training seminars and workshops, group work, individual supervision, crisis intervention, and conflict resolution. These interventions can focus on resolving conflict between or within student groups, helping student staff develop their skills, or dealing with a crisis, like alcohol poisoning at a student-sponsored event.

The type of helping skills needed for administrative positions are unique and may require using helping skills with faculty, parents, and community members in addition to working with students. The interventions used may include individual meetings with parents, students, and other constituent groups;

conflict resolution meetings; and large group meetings. Group facilitation, individual supervision, conflict management, and crisis intervention are some of the helping skills necessary for administration-related jobs. The content of some of these interventions may include student behavioral issues, parental concerns or disagreement with institutional decisions, or a campus crisis, like the suicide or murder of a student.

Finally, the academic affairs positions that are sometimes situated within student affairs divisions necessitate the use of helping skills in addressing important academic concerns, such as advisement, tutorial services, and working directly with faculty and academic deans. The interventions typically used include individual meetings with students and faculty members and training sessions with faculty members, tutors, or other relevant personnel. Some of the specific skills used in academic-related positions include those microcounseling skills necessary for advising, facilitating training and workshops, and consulting with faculty members. The content of these interventions may focus on properly advising students with significant mental health and personal issues that affect their academics, helping tutors motivate their students, and identifying and implementing policies for dealing with disruptive students in class.

Challenges and Benefits of Being a Helper

There are many challenges and benefits to being a helper on a college campus. Some of the more foreboding challenges arise from the complex ethical and legal realities that exist today on college campuses. *In loco parentis* no longer exists as a formal response to students, and yet it is clear that both legal and moral responsibilities for students' well-being exist beyond the classroom (Nuss, 1998). Campuses have the ability and responsibility to regulate student conduct through established student codes and judicial proceedings. Although most campuses want to provide students with freedom and responsibilities that

enhance their development, significant ethical and legal challenges influence how campuses approach these issues. Federal and state legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act, health privacy through the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, and educational records privacy through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act provide parameters that influence policy and practice on college campuses. Decisions like when to deny a student with significant substance abuse issues access to such services as campus housing or what to do with suicidal students who are affecting the campus community can be stressful for student affairs professionals. Recent litigation in Massachusetts and elsewhere highlights the liability risk that even noncounseling professionals have on college campuses (Benton & Benton, 2006b). Many campuses are actively working to create policies and practices that empower students with mental health difficulties yet control the liability and risk that those issues may place on the institution. Further discussion of relevant ethical issues occurs in Chapter 3.

Other challenges that student affairs professionals face result from some of the demands that come with being a helper. According to Corey and Corey (1998), there are two primary sources of stress for helpers: individual and environmental. Examples of some of the individual sources of stress include self-doubt, perfectionistic expectations, emotional exhaustion, and assuming too much responsibility for those being helped. Dealing with emotional students—whether they are angry, depressed, or anxious—can be draining. Setting up appropriate boundaries—especially in demanding positions where one is not limited to daytime responsibilities, as in residence life and student activities—is a learned skill. One of the primary edicts of counseling training is that to be effective, helpers must know themselves and understand why they chose to be helpers and what personal issues may sometimes interfere with being effective (Faiver, Eisengart, & Colonna, 1995; Meier & Davis, 1997). Many helpers are not necessarily good at asking for help

themselves and do not always attend to their own needs and feelings (Corey & Corey). Without proper boundaries and the ability to prioritize self-care, it is possible to burn out, which ultimately means that helping others becomes a stressful burden (Davis & Markley, 2000).

External or environmental factors also contribute to the stress level of being in a helping role. Examples of some of the environmental sources of stress in higher education include too many demands and frustration with a bureaucracy that sometimes gets in the way of helping others. By nature, some of these difficulties are beyond the helper's control, but being successful means learning to deal with them. Sometimes the needs of students, especially those who have mental health or substance abuse issues, seem endless, and when there are not effective institutional policies and practices to address such students' concerns, it often falls on individual practitioners to fill the gap.

However, just as there are challenges to being a helper on today's college campuses, there are benefits as well. The many and diverse ways that student affairs professionals assist college students in developing as human beings, reaching their academic and career goals, and making a difference in the world can be very motivating. Mentoring students and seeing them grow and develop over time, helping students face difficult life challenges like the death of a parent, and advocating for students to ensure that their needs and rights are addressed on campus are just some of the experiences that student affairs professionals may find invigorating and inspiring. Helping others seems to make individuals feel better about themselves, others, and the world around them (Corey & Corey, 1998).

Preparation and Training for Being a Helper

Most, if not all, student affairs preparation programs provide specific academic courses to assist new professionals in developing the helping and interpersonal skills necessary to meet

college students' needs more effectively. The expectations of the *Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Master's-Level Graduate Program for Student Affairs Professionals Standards and Guidelines* (CAS, 2003) and the historical linking of student affairs preparation programs with counseling programs have led many graduate programs to emphasize counseling (Hyman, 1985). At first glance this linkage may provide an ideal union that benefits graduate students in student affairs; however, the actual implementation may not fully assist graduate students in developing their helping skills in ways that will fully benefit them as student affairs professionals.

As mentioned in the preface, many of these counseling courses have been modeled after beginning counseling courses for master's-level counseling students. In fact, it is common for student affairs or higher education professionals to be required to take one or two counseling courses alongside graduate students in counseling programs (e.g., counseling psychology, school or guidance counseling) that focus more on clinical and therapeutic issues rather than address the unique helping competencies needed for practitioners working in higher education. Although these courses may be interesting and provide important information, they often offer far too much traditional clinical content and not enough background on how to be a helper in a nonclinical context. In addition, these courses often emphasize counseling theory at a level that is beyond the scope and type of helping that most student affairs professionals, as "allied professional counselors," use or need in their daily practice. Learning about Freud and related therapy techniques in depth will not assist the typical student affairs practitioner in comforting or advising a student who wants to withdraw from school because of a death in the family, in understanding and addressing the deleterious group dynamics present among a dysfunctional resident assistant staff, or in challenging student leaders to take more responsibility for their campus organizations.

As the study by Burkard et al. (2005) suggested, graduate preparation programs in student affairs may need to reexamine the training they provide in human relations and helping skills. The changing needs of students and the ever-expanding role of student affairs practitioners require a higher level of interpersonal skills and personal qualities to assist professionals in their work with students, parents, faculty members, and administrators at all levels of leadership. For example, interactions with parents are becoming an increasingly common task for student affairs professionals that requires nuanced skills.

Summary

Helping is one of the core competencies that constitute some of the awareness, knowledge, and skills that student affairs professionals need to be effective and ethical practitioners. Although most are not counselors, student affairs professionals “cannot predict or choose when they will be called upon to be helpers; opportunities and challenges are presented daily” (Winston, 2003, p. 501). Therefore, it is essential that their academic preparation and professional development focus on creating and enhancing essential helping skills that allow them to perform all aspects of their work more effectively. This chapter has discussed the role of student affairs on campus and how being helpers has been central to that role from the very beginning; it also made a case for helping as a core competence for all student affairs professionals and identified the benefits and challenges of being a helper.

