Knowledge Evaluation and Professional Development Plan

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My undergraduate experiences, graduate program and internships, and my personal foundations have helped me gain knowledge in various professional areas. My knowledge within student affairs is broad, including working with students, understanding student development theories, and learning best practices for various functional areas. It is through my involvement in student organizations, research, and guidance from mentors that I have been able to expand my knowledge. I have gained knowledge and skills in orientation/first-year programs, supervising students, advising student organizations, and multicultural competence. Although I understand there are limitations in my knowledge, I am confident in these areas transitioning into my first professional student affairs position.

**Orientation/First-Year Programs**

Orientation/first-year programs have been a passion of mine since my own new student summer orientation. My primary knowledge within this area has come from coursework within the College Student Personnel program and various experiences I have had during my collegiate educational journey.

The opportunity to work with students as they embark on their collegiate experience is what I cherish most about orientation/first-year programs. It was during CSP 6020: Theory and Assessment of College Student Development, which I learned more about Nancy Schlossberg’s Theory of Transitions, a theory I believe is prevalent in all aspects of orientation/first-year programs. Schlossberg’s theory focuses on four S’s: situation, self, support, and strategies (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Students participating in orientation/first-year programs are many times at the beginning of their transitional journey. Knowledge of the Schlossberg’s Theory of Transitions has informed how I work with incoming first-year students. For instance, during my time as a summer orientation counselor I assisted incoming students in this time of transition. I introduced them to the resources available that will help them be successful, provided opportunities to meet and interact with peers who will soon be their support system, and equipped them with the skills to excel.

“Communities offer a sense of belonging, security, and engagement of participants, but they also do much more” (Strange &Banning, 2001, p. 161). It was within the CSP 6030: Theory and Assessment of Educational Environmentscourse I learned how much of a role environments play into students feeling included. The course went into depth the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for students to feel comfortable (Strange & Banning, 2001). One of the key aspects of orientation/first-year programs I worked with during my graduate internship was making sure first-year students participating in the program felt engaged. My knowledge of environments influenced how I trained the orientation counselors, helping them to understand the importance of working to create that welcoming and engaging environment. I used my knowledge to construct this type environment by having orientation counselors work one on one with students and used inclusive language that provided first-year students with a sense of belonging to Ohio Northern’s campus. I furthermore used this knowledge of environments when logistically setting up the programs. This included setting up a balloon path to guide guests, separating students and guests throughout the program, or moving course registration to the end of the day.

I strive to continue to work professionally within orientation/first-year programs. The knowledge I have gained about orientation/first-year programs through my coursework and previous experiences will allow me to be versatile and resourceful as I continue within the profession. Using my theoretical foundation, I will have the ability to be intentional when planning orientation/first-year programs, supervising student leaders, and working with first-year students.

**Supervising Students**

I gained my knowledge for supervising students through guidance from mentors and previous supervisors. Additional knowledge about supervising I gained from concepts learned in the CSP 6020: Theory and Assessment of College Student Developmentcourse. Supervising has allowed me to learn more about myself and discover my desire for working with students. Blending my personal models and knowledge gained within coursework, I have been able to create my supervisory style. Conversations with mentors and watching exceptional supervisors in action, has helped me developed my personal models for supervision, “supervising by example” and “as a supervisor I will never ask my students to do something I would not do myself.”

My coursework has also influenced the development of my supervisory style. During CSP 6020: Theory and Assessment of College Student Development, I learned about Nevitt Sanford’s Challenge and Support Theory. A theory based around the idea that in order for students to develop there must be a proper balance of challenge and support (Evans et al., 2010).I truly try to implement this into my supervisory style. I apply this theory to practice by challenging my students to strive for more than the bare minimum, praising them in their triumphs, and supporting them in their struggles.

Also within my coursework, I have expanded my knowledge in cognitive, moral, and identity development theories. Working as a supervisor, I work with a variety of students all at a varying levels of development. Through this knowledge, I am more adept to assess where students are developmentally and tailor my supervision to fit their needs. I worked to provide and train students with the skills necessary to succeed and excel in their jobs.

As I continue into a professional position, there is a possibility that I will be in a supervisory role. My knowledge in supervising students has allowed me to recognize my supervising strengths. I am able to use this broad knowledge when supervising regardless of the environment. My knowledge gained as a supervisor helped me to understand how influential this role is, and as I advance within the profession this knowledge will provide me with tools to be an effective supervisor.

**Advising Student Organizations**

My internship at Ohio Northern University has provided me the opportunity to advise various types of student organizations. It is through hands-on advising, gaining a deeper understanding of the Theory of Self-Authorship, and attendance at a professional conference that have served as my principal source of knowledge.

My first encounter with student organization advisors was during my undergraduate journey. Most of my advisors were hands-on and extremely helpful; however, my sorority advisor was the exact opposite. This lack of advising and support inspired me to be different as I adopted my advisory style. I worked to be a very hands-on advisor, working to attend as much as I can and being active with the organizations. Each organization I advised attracted a different population of students, which required me to advise each organization a little differently to best fit the organizations’ and the members’ needs. Understanding that I needed to be adaptable in my advising has helped me become a better advisor.

The opportunity to develop students through organizational advising has been what I enjoy most about my internship. I encouraged students to take ownership of their college experience and leadership roles. I am able to apply theory to practice using Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship; the theory explains the developmental journey students take towards becoming key decision makers of their own lives (Evans et al., 2010). For example, I advised my students using guidance, not answers, allowing students take ownership of their decisions. I encouraged students to incorporate reflective conversations, providing an environment that prompts creativity and intentionality.

One of the most helpful professional development opportunities has been my attendance at the Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors (AFA) Annual Meeting. The AFA Annual Meeting provided professionals the chance to “gain knowledge, skills, and awareness to enhance their work” (Association of Fraternity and Sorority Advisors, 2013).Through my attendance, I was able to connect with experienced Greek Life advisors and other new professionals, inquire innovative ideas to bring back to my own campus, and further my insight and understanding. It was through attendance at this conference that I was able to gain more confidence in my student organization advising.

I have developed the skills to be a successful student organization advisor. As I continue within student affairs, I hope to remain advising in some aspect whether that is professionally or as a volunteer. My ability to guide students through their own self-authorship will be an essential skill that I will utilize as I continue within the field.

**Multicultural Competence**

My coursework in CSP 6035: Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs and ETHN 6200: Theories of Race Relations, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism equipped me with the abilities and knowledge to exhibit multicultural competence. This awareness and knowledge plays a major role in how I see the world around me, how I interact with students, and how I work within student affairs.

CSP 6035: Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs aided me in not only learning more about my own identity, but also learning more about the identity of others. I gained a greater understanding of power and privilege. For instance, through my Program Design & Assessment project, I was able to have a candid conversation with students about recognizing their own power and privilege, working to develop their own identity, and becoming multiculturally aware. It was within the CSP 6035: Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs course where I learned more about Watt’s Privilege Identity Exploration (PIE) model. The PIE model helps to describe common behaviors we as facilitators might see as we lead our students through difficult conversations (2007). Watt (2007) explains that these defenses and behaviors are common and reactionary with the understanding that the facilitator must work to move students through these defenses and through difficult dialogue. For example, I have used the PIE model when conducting the Cultural Conversation program, a program that involves students discussing current multicultural issues. By using the PIE Model, I am aware of students’ common behaviors and reactions, I work with students to move through these initial emotions, and participate in a sincere conversation. ETHN 6200: Theories of Race Relations, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism taught me the history behind a variety of the laws, biases, and policies. The required readings within the course provided me with a historical viewpoint on multicultural issues. I was able to gain a deeper insight on prejudices, assumptions, and understanding of others’ worldview.

**Areas of Improvement**

My experiences have equipped me with a wealth of broad knowledge, but I still have much more to learn. I have had opportunities to experiment in a variety of functional areas; this has allowed me to have a general exposure to various aspects of student affairs. To continue to succeed as a student affairs professional, I must expand my knowledge in residence life, student conduct, financial aid, social justice, and assessment. I chose these five areas to expand my knowledge based on the types of positions I might obtain as a new professional. In addition, I chose these areas to gain further knowledge in areas I am unfamiliar with, to acquire skills that would make me a more knowledgeable resource to students, and my personal interests.

**Residence Life**

I have had brief encounters with residence life, from living in the residence hall to serving on an on-call rotation for student affairs. Although I have a basic knowledge of residence life, a deeper understanding of the logistical and inner working would be extremely beneficial. Improving my knowledge is a way to deeper understand and help students through their time in residence life. A deeper understanding will help further enhance my work with resident assistants and help me gain a broader knowledge of running a residence hall building. This knowledge will complement areas I am confident in such as orientation/first-year programs and supervising students. By combining these knowledge areas, I would be able to train resident assistants in creating a welcoming and belonging environment for first-year students.

**Student Conduct**

The breadth of my knowledge about student conduct is how conduct is run at a smaller institution. I would specifically, like to learn more about the restorative justice model, a model that focuses on the needs of everyone involved within the community, not just the punishing the offender (University of Michigan, 2014). Student conduct will play a role in some of the students’ lives that I work with, and to be a successful practitioner, I must have an improved understanding of the conduct process. With the possibility of obtaining a position in residence life, many hall directors work with lower level conduct cases. This deeper knowledge of the restorative justice model and student conduct process will allow me to handle my conduct cases in an informative and developmental way.

**Financial Aid**

Loan debt is a very real and current issue for many students; having the ability to engage in conversations with students about this issue is very important. Financial aid is continuously changing, I understand I cannot learn everything, but I think it is imperative to know the basics of student loans, government grants, scholarships, and loan repayment. Financial aid many times is an isolated department; countless individuals think all the department deals with is loans, grants, and scholarships. I would like to develop my knowledge in other resources and services financial aid offers. Expanding my knowledge within financial aid will allow me to serve as a greater resource to students, teaching them the importance of financial responsibility.

**Social Justice**

The coursework within my graduate program has served as the foundation of my knowledge and understanding of social justice. Although I am confident in leading and navigating students through difficult dialogues, I hope to implement more social justice and identity development theories within these conversations (Reason, 2008). Because I am committed to serving as an advocate for all students’ voices, I still have a lot of work to do to achieve a high level of understanding. Specifically, I wish to learn more about how to be a resourceful and better advocate for students different from myself. Developing my knowledge of social justice will allow me to expand my personal advocacy and furthermore encourage students to be social justice advocates.

**Assessment**

During a time when institutions and departments are forced to do more with less, it is vital that I am intentional in all that I do. Having only done small-scale assessment, usually program participant surveys, further knowledge in assessment will be advantageous. Specifically, I would like to gain a foundational knowledge of formal assessment methods and data reporting. As I continue within student affairs, as a Director or Dean of Students I will be asked to complete large-scale assessment. It is crucial I know the basics of assessment and have a strong foundation. This is also very important if I choose to continue and obtain my doctorate. Assessment plays a large role in dissertations. Gaining more knowledge in assessment will be valuable both professionally and personally.

**Professional Development Plan**

As I begin my role as a new professional, it is essential I have a detailed professional development plan. The following three-year plans indicate areas in which I hope to develop. I selected these areas regarding what would prepare me professionally and what I value personally. These knowledge areas include orientation/first-year programs, social justice, supervising, assessment, and residence life.

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| **Orientation/First-Year Programs**  As a new professional hoping to work within orientation/first-year programs, it is advantageous I further my knowledge. If I am not working in orientation/first-year programs professionally, I hope to continue this passion in some capacity. I would like to stay informed about current trends and issues, as well as best practices within the area. I would like to become actively involved in the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA). Involvement will expand my knowledge of the field and allow me to network with other professionals in this area. | | |
| **First Year** | **Second Year** | **Third Year** |
| * Maintain NODA membership * Explore resources at the institution and network with colleagues * Familiarize myself with Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Standards for Orientation Programs (2012) | * Maintain NODA membership * Attend an orientation/first-year programs webinar * If not professionally working in orientation/first-year programs volunteer to help or represent my department during a program or teaching a first-year experience course | * Subscribe to *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition* (JCOT) * Attend NODA national or regional conference/or First-Year Experience Conference * Become active member within NODA (e.g. conference volunteering, presenting, serving as executive member) |

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| **Social Justice**  To further my knowledge within social justice and to be a better equipped to educate students in this topic; I must gain more theoretical and practical knowledge within this area. I hope to become confident in my social justice advocacy. | | |
| **First Year** | **Second Year** | **Third Year** |
| * Seek out an experienced professional and campus events that promote social justice and multicultural competence * Attend a webinar related to social justice * Read *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America*  (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) | * Participate in Safe Zone training * Attend conference sessions regarding social justice * Read *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything You American History Textbook Got Wrong* (Loewen, 1996) | * Participate in Social Justice Training Institute * Read *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World* (Cannon & Perkins, 2009) * Seek opportunities to work with students and teach about being a social justice advocate |

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| **Supervising**  I had the opportunity to supervise many different types of students; most of my supervision has been in an orientation environment working with primarily undergraduate students. As a full-time professional, there is a possibility to supervise students in other capacities, also supervising paraprofessionals and professionals. Each of these new supervisory roles will have varying supervisory needs, it is important to learn and appreciate how to support these needs. | | |
| **First Year** | **Second Year** | **Third Year** |
| * Attend conference sessions and webinars related to being a successful supervisor * Seek out opportunities to supervise students and paraprofessionals | * Read *Supervising New Professionals in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practioners* (Janosik, Creamer, Hirt, Winston, Saunders, Cooper, 2003) * Connect with past supervisors to gain guidance | * Serve on a university search committee * Read *First Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently* (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) |

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| **Assessment**  Assessment is my weakest area of knowledge. I hope to become skillful in basic level assessment and to learn the fundamentals. Having the ability to prove my programs and services are intentional and that they align with the institutional mission and learning outcomes is vital if I wish to be successful within student affairs. | | |
| **First Year** | **Second Year** | **Third Year** |
| * Gain further knowledge regarding assessment within my department * Connect with Institutional Research to learn about institutional-wide assessment and research * Attend conference sessions about assessment | * Engage in assessment on my campus within my department * Seek out best practices for assessment within my current functional areas * Conduct assessment on a specific program | * Attend relevant conference sessions * Attend webinars on assessment and research * Work collaboratively with colleagues to create or reevaluate a department or division wide assessment plan |

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| **Residence Life**  Although I have worked with residence life in various ways, I have never formally worked within the functional area. As a new professional there is a possibility I may obtain a job in residence life, so I must be mindful in developing within this area. | | |
| **First Year** | **Second Year** | **Third Year** |
| * Familiarize myself with CAS Standards for Residence Life (2012) * Seek out opportunities to connect with Resident Assistants and professionals within Residence Life * Gain more information about Association of College and University Housing Officers (ACUHO-I) | * Subscribe to “Connections”, a weekly electronic newsletter that gives updates about issues that affect campus housing (ACUHO-I, 2014) * Subscribe to the ACUHO-Blog, a blog where “association leaders, staff, and volunteers write share information and commentary regarding ACUHO-I and the campus housing profession as a whole” (ACUHO-I, 2014) | * Attend ACUHO-I national or regional conference/ or attend a housing webinar * Volunteer with Residence Life including events, move-in, staff training * Join ACUHO-I or ACPA Commission for Housing and Residential Life |

**Conclusion**

Summing up these last two years, I have gained an incredible amount of knowledge. I have actively participated in integrative learning by applying experiences from both inside and outside the classroom. I am successfully able to implement theory to practice and be a hands-on practitioner. My experiences prior to graduate school and during my time at Bowling Green State University have allowed me to develop a solid knowledge in an assortment of areas. While I am very strong in some areas, I am also aware that I need to gain further knowledge in a variety of other areas. Student affairs is an ever-changing field and I must be active in my growth and development. I have a commitment to actively working to utilize resources and local opportunities, understanding that as a new professional I must be financially creative in finding professional development avenues. I am confident that the array of opportunities within my professional development plan will provide me with inventive ideas, connect me with other professionals, and expand my knowledge.

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