**Exploding a Myth: Student Affairs'
Historical Relationship with Technology**

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Student affairs professionals are not technologically savvy, creative, or up-to-date. That's the common myth, right? This myth does not appear to hold if one explores both historical and contemporary student affairs-related documents and publications, particularly the journals and conference proceedings of the two leading and historically important student affairs professional organizations, ACPA and NASPA. These documents reveal that student affairs professionals in America have throughout their history made significant and timely use of technologies as they have become available.

First, let us note that "technology" is much broader than computers and the Internet. From a very broad perspective, the use of tools and systems to help adapt to the growing complexity of the modern world has a long history. Some of the great scholars of the development of the information age, most notably Beniger (1986) and Galbraith (1971), have included organizational developments such as the committee, bureaucracy, and middle management as key technologies used to manage growth, change, and large volumes of information. Similarly, the use of common forms to standardize data collection, input, and reporting is another example of an oft-overlooked technology developed specifically to deal with complexity and volume. These familiar technologies are in widespread use among student affairs professionals as they are among all modern professions and organizations.

Student affairs professionals have also made appropriate use of more recognizably modern technologies such as the telephone. For example, at Indiana University the very first phone number listed in the campus phone directory (on the inside cover, before even reaching the title page and regular listings) for many of the first several years the directory was printed was that of the Mrs. Alice Nelson, Director of the Halls of Residence (Indiana University, 1939a; 1946). Similarly, responses to a 1939 survey conducted by Indiana University staff to determine if telephones should be placed in residence halls reveal that student affairs professionals at many different institutions had given thought to the appropriate use of this technology and its intended role in resident students' lives (Indiana University, 1939b).

Documentary evidence of student affairs use of television and radio is less readily available but it also reveals intentional use of modern technologies as they become available. Many campuses began student-operated radio stations in the late 1940s but these stations were typically associated with academic units, primarily electrical engineering or broadcasting and journalism programs (Bryant, 1981). There were, however, some stations operated in residence halls, including several low power radio stations at Indiana University that broadcast to residents using the electrical wiring in each residence hall (Brant, 1981; Indiana University, 1961). Radio has also seen use as an civic engagement tool as demonstrated by a program hosted by Furman University's Dean of Women where women students were given explicit permission to "stay up late" to watch and listen to returns from the 1970 presidential election (Furman University, 1970). As televisions permeated American homes in the 1950s, it too began to appear in American college and university residence halls.

Evidence of student affairs interest in computers dates to at least 1962 with an ACPA conference program entitled "Useful Data Processing for Student Personnel Research" (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1962). Several programs focused on the use of computers in administration and student records were presented at the 1966 NASPA conference (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1966). That same year saw the publication an article entitled "Electronic Data in Processing Placement" in the NASPA Journal (Menke, 1966). Since then, technology-related presentations and articles have been regular features at the conferences and in publications of the major student affairs professional associations. As these technologies have moved from data processing to management information systems (MIS) to modern information technology (IT), student affairs professionals have largely kept pace.

One can argue that knowledge and use of modern technology has been a part of the student affairs profession even from its earliest days. Proceedings from early meetings of ACPA feature many presentations and papers by employees of some of America's most advanced corporations: American Telephone and Telegraph Company (ACPA, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1939), General Electric Company (ACPA, 1935), Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company (ACPA, 1935, 1939, 1941), United States Steel Corporation (ACPA, 1938), Eastman Kodak Company (ACPA, 1939), and Lockheed Aircraft Corporation (ACPA, 1942). While some of these presentations were of original research conducted on college graduates in the workforce, many presentations and speeches focused on what these businesses expected of college graduates. The historical record of the student affairs national organizations predating the 1960s is fragmentary so it is difficult to pinpoint the relationship between student affairs professionals and these and other technologically-sophisticated corporations but the available documents clearly indicate a strong and continuing relationship that may have influenced the views and use of technology by student affairs professionals.

The puzzle piece missing from all of this is the student viewpoint. There is little evidence in the historical documents I have examined that student affairs administrators and researchers regularly and systematically sought to understand how and why students used technology and the impact on their development. Of course, lack of evidence does not necessarily imply evidence of a lack. Further work must be done to determine if the apparent lack of available historical documents reflects a historical lack of systematic interest in student use of technologies or merely a shortcoming in the materials I have examined.

Undoubtedly there are other rich sources of data to inform our understanding of how student affairs professionals use and relate to technology, particularly in the archives of individual institutions and the documents and memories of individual practitioners. But it seems likely that those sources would only add to and flesh out this history of appropriate and timely use of technologies without altering our fundamental conclusions: Student affairs professionals as a whole have consistently demonstrated an appreciation for and understanding of technologies, particularly those that can be applied to administrative processes. But they do not appear to have consistently explored how and why students have used technologies. It is difficult to explain this apparent historical discrepancy.

In the end, I am hopeful and excited as we to close the gap and explore student use of technology. I look forward to exploring with you exactly how we are closing that gap and what we are learning about students' use of technology and how the use of those technologies impacts their intellectual, social, and ethical development.

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