

## To Boldly Go

Eric Stoller  
Student Affairs Practitioner  
[ericstoller@gmail.com](mailto:ericstoller@gmail.com)

Eric blogs at <http://ericstoller.com/blog>

*"They should have explained the basic concepts at the beginning (e.g.: podcasts, blogs, wikis, etc.)."*

*"Be less technical."*

*"Helping me to boldly go where I've never been before."*

One of these statements is not like the other two. I'm sure you can guess which one gives me hope as a student affairs techie that we as a profession have not lost our willingness to learn, to explore and to stay positive about new technologies. This article represents a call to action for student affairs practitioners. The microblogging site, Twitter (<http://twitter.com>), has a feature that lets you "nudge" someone that you are following. This is me providing a gentle nudge to my fellow higher education administrators. I hope that you nudge me back. Let's push the envelope. Let's shift our professional paradigms. Let's make technology (and learning about new technologies) a part of our daily practices.

### The Past, Present, and Future – Why We Need to Take a Quantum Leap

The student affairs technology bar has been set far too low. I remember joking with a colleague about how I kept seeing presentations on "Instant Messaging - The New Frontier." Trust me, the frontier is not new. It's only new because we seem to have a mandate in student affairs that technology does not "emerge" until it has been in use for at least 3 to 4 years (and that's me being charitably optimistic). In its past incarnations, Student Affairs the profession, has relied on external technology resources. On-campus technology support offices and third-party vendors have known for quite a while that student affairs practitioners generally know very little about technology. This is usually why technology-related vendors can charge obscene amounts for their services or why our own tech support offices treat us so poorly. Technology knowledge for most student affairs practitioners is something that is akin to alchemy. Tech support offices or vendors are like magicians. Their knowledge is shrouded in a cloud of obfuscation and impersonation. They know that we don't know. They know that we will pay them whatever they want because we don't know. And the best part for them is that they know that we exist in a culture where not knowing is okay! Student Affairs practitioners have long been members of higher education's technology "illiterati."

The good news for student affairs techies like myself and a small but burgeoning community is that things are starting to change. NASPA resurrected the Technology Knowledge Community thanks to prominent student affairs techies like Leslie Dare (2006), Kevin Guidry (2008) and Kevin Kruger. The NASPA Technology Knowledge Community recently held a 2-month-long, blog-based, introduction to technology series (link to NASPA Tech Tools - <http://naspatechtools.org/blog/>) that featured posts on blogging, RSS, social networking, and podcasts. According to Kevin Guidry (2008), the blog received a few hundred unique visitors. That's not a lot, but it's a start.

At the NASPA National Conference in Boston, a presentation was given on the need to include technology as part of the core competencies of college student services administration graduate

programs. I hope that student affairs masters program coordinators were in attendance. Technology as a competency, as an inherent component that resides within all of our skill-sets. What a novel and paradigm pushing idea!

I was recently invited to be on the curriculum committee for the upcoming NACADA Technology Seminar (February 2009). The group consists of academic advisors that are plugged into new technologies. We've been holding our meetings virtually via a Wimba room (<http://www.wimba.com/>) and sharing information via Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com/>). Our primary goals are to create a learning event that utilizes the latest and most useful of new technologies. Every attendee will be encouraged to bring a laptop to the event as wifi will be available for free. When have you ever attended a student affairs conference that offered free wireless Internet connectivity as a basic feature? This could be the first time it has ever happened. We are also going to attempt to create the first student affairs seminar "back channel." A WordPress-based (<http://wordpress.org>) blog aggregator will stream data from blog posts, user comments, Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) microblogs, and Flickr (<http://flickr.com/>) photos to a single site. Seminar attendees will have the opportunity to interact with seminar faculty and non-attendees will be able to participate via this back channel of information. The potential for radical, paradigm-shifting, information exchange is phenomenal.

In the future, I think that Student Affairs technologist positions will soon be de facto components to collegiate student affairs divisions. Graduate programs will require students to show that they are graduating with competency in technology. Vendors will no longer see student affairs divisions as being "low hanging fruit." Our on-campus tech support offices will see us as colleagues that are mutually striving to utilize cutting edge technologies.

#### Facing Facebook

Have you noticed something? Something missing from this essay on student affairs and technology...a little something called Facebook.

I know you have heard of Facebook. You may have even attended one of the thousands of Facebook sessions that started to pop up on the student affairs conference circuit. But here is where it gets tricky. Have you ever actually used it? You know, signed up for an account and actually tried to figure it out. Scores of our students have signed up for Facebook and yet there are still student affairs practitioners who are brave enough to ask the most inane questions about Facebook, in front of their peers, at a student affairs conference! It's like someone asked you how to print an email because they never turned on their printer. C'mon folks. It is time to stop asking and start learning. That's what we ask our students to do. We ask them to learn new things on a daily basis during their collegiate experience. And yet we seem frozen in some sort of mid-1990's technology mindset. Face Facebook. Learn how it works and move on. It is as ubiquitous as email. We stopped having presentations on the "dynamics of email" a long time ago.

#### The Undiscovered Country

This is a call to action. A call to start learning. To boldly go where we haven't gone before and to embrace the dissonance of not knowing. To seek out new forms of technology and new ways of learning. Our journeys into technology have never before been as pivotal as they are today. Our students are relying on us to be as savvy as they are. Our budgets are being trimmed with shears that leave little excess. Let us utilize technology to be more efficient, to be better communicators, and to truly be enhanced educators.

\*\*\*\*\*

By the way, I used Delicious to bookmark all of my ideas for this piece.  
(<http://delicious.com/ericstoller/student-affairs-technology?setcount=25>) Haven't heard of Delicious?  
Check it out at <http://delicious.com/>  
\*\*\*\*\*

#### References

Dare, L. (2006). Technology in student affairs: Seeking knowledge, craving community. *StudentAffairs On-Line*. Retrieved August 30, 2008, from ([http://studentaffairs.com/ejournal/Summer\\_2006/TechnologyinStudentAffairs.html](http://studentaffairs.com/ejournal/Summer_2006/TechnologyinStudentAffairs.html))

Guidry, K. (2008). Mistaken goal: Where student affairs & technology meet. Retrieved August 30, 2008, from <http://mistakengoal.com/blog>