



Podcast: Student Affairs One Thing

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Summary: We chat with Dr. Nancy Crimmin, former President at Becker College. Dr. Crimmin also served as Vice President of Student Affairs at Becker College and, previously, as Dean of College Life at Assumption College.

B E G I N T R A N S C R I P T

Stuart Brown: Welcome to the Student Affairs One thing, a podcast that asks a simple question of seasoned student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, the founder of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. On our pages we have the most cost effective job posting board, listing hundreds of open student services positions, a wide range of webinars and a virtual exhibit hall. We would like to thank our sponsor, the National Society of Leadership and Success, the largest leadership honor society in the nation, providing an accredited five step leadership development program for members to build their leadership skills. With chapters at over 700 colleges across the country, the NSLS delivers guaranteed student engagement, increased student retention and is financially self-sustainability. Learn more at NSLS.org.

On today's episode, I am very pleased to have Dr. Nancy Crimmin, who has been in the field of student affairs for over 35 years. She was a former NASP region one vice president, dean of campus life at Assumption College and former president of Becker College. Welcome to the program Nancy.

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: Thank you so happy to be here.

Stuart Brown: So what is your one thing?

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: I'm going to talk today about keeping the positive for the good stuff. What I mean by that and where this came from? Well over 35 years ago in one of my first graduate classes, my faculty member and adviser was leading a conversation about how to manage the emotional toll that this work can sometimes have on ourselves, how we feel, how we manage things are emotional health. So the conversations back then might have sounded a little bit different than they do today, but the themes are really the same. We talked about taking care of yourself and taking time, what we might say now balance and self-care, talking to a trusted family member, friend, mentor, stepping away for a bit and taking some space, all common things, maybe some professional counseling, if it really feels like this is getting to be too much.

One of her suggestions that has really stuck with me, my entire career, was to keep the positive, keep the good stuff that comes your way and what she meant by that was when you get a note something small from a student, a parent, a faculty member, your supervisor, a colleague, keep it. Get a box, put it on your shelf and keep the good stuff. Tuck it away. You never know when you might want to sit down someday and go through that and how that can help put in perspective the work that we do because sometimes our days aren't filled with the good stuff.

I thought it sounded like a good idea. It didn't really hit home until two years later. My first job. The first note came. It was very short note from a student who lived in my building who I just sat up with the night before talking about a roommate situation to me. It was all in a day's work. But then the note came and she said, thank you. It meant a lot. It put things in perspective regardless. I kept the note and I went out and I bought a box, a pink box because that makes me happy.

And I put the note in the box and then another note came. This one from one of my parents. Thank you for helping out my son. He had a real difficult semester. You made a difference. I put it in the box and so it just kept going. It's been over 35 years and I just kept adding to the box. Eventually notes changed and you didn't get a hard copy note in campus mail or with a stamp from the post office. You got an email. I print them off, put him in the box. Eventually, every once in a while I should say I would take the box down, read through some things.

Maybe a fond memory would pop up sometimes. I might not even remember who this particular student was, but now I remember how I made her feel or she felt seen, she felt heard appreciated. Perhaps over time I bought some really cute note paper and stationery and I started sending notes maybe to someone who's program I attended to thank them for a great job or to say how much I enjoyed it. Or if I knew someone was going through a hard time just acknowledging that and saying I'm here.

If you need anything I'm here, it doesn't have to be long. It was just a quick thing. Maybe I bought a card and sent it off, but I really have tried to make that part of my work. We talk a lot about gratitude and appreciation and how important it is and especially in challenging times to know that someone sees you, that they heard you, that they appreciate. You can make all the difference in the world. I've thought about the box countless times and I love hearing that people have a box because they remembered that conversation and I like to think that when I send a note it makes a difference because I know when I receive a note even in the most challenging of personal times or professional times, how much it makes a difference to me and regardless of where I've been in my professional journey, that has made a difference.

And like I said, I really hope that my note, my card, maybe a phone call, but something has made a difference. And don't we all need that especially now during these challenging times and work is challenging in and of itself and adding all the external pressures and adding all that's happening in the world, sometimes it feels overwhelming. And so picking the box off the shelf, sitting down maybe with a beverage of choice and just reading through how I made a difference or how you made a difference.

If you look through your box, maybe it's a file. It doesn't have to be a box. But showing appreciation and gratitude can really help someone put their work in perspective. Like I said, especially during the tough times, remembering why we do this work, remembering the impact that we have and taking note of fact and being cognizant of that I think helps us get through the challenging times. It also puts things in perspective. So that's my one thing.

Stuart Brown: I think that's such a great one thing and it really resonates with me because a couple years ago I did a writing project and I wrote hundreds of notes and one of my personal professional goals is always to write a note - students, to everyone that you've talked about, because and the reaction, especially now. I mean 35 years ago, it was common practice. You write a note, there was no such thing as email. So I make it a point to write a note, address it to their home address. I put a special stamp on it and the comments I get back. I mean people are almost in tears sometimes because they don't get that anymore. I mean it's getting to be this lost art. So to have something where whether it's an email, physical note to keep putting into that box and it's such a simple thing.

I mean, I would hope listeners would hear you and say, oh my goodness, what a fantastic idea to have that and tucked away because everyone's received notes. You put it here, you put it there, you kind of lose track. So I think it's a very poignant story and it could be very impactful. Like you said, we're dealing with challenging times right now and who doesn't need a pick me up? Go to your box. And I'm sure you go through those old ones. You smile, you laugh to yourself about, right?

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: And it does pick you up and I received one of your notes a long time ago Stu. And I'm sure it's in my box. When I cleaned out my office recently, I actually took the box and I emptied it into a plastic trash bag and I thought, okay, I don't need this. And five minutes later I went back and I dug every single one of those notes out of the bag, put them back in, took him home. And that night spread them all out on my kitchen island and I went through every single one of them who said, you know, thank you, my son was going through challenging cancer treatments and when you were in housing, you helped us with his situation and it just made it easier and you're right, you laugh, you cry. And I have to say there's this one parent of a student who's now in the field has been in the field for quite a while. This mom sends me a card every Mother's Day Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas. Every year with a note. She always has since her daughter graduated probably 15 years ago.

Stuart Brown: Okay, I'm gonna have to stop you because I'm crying.

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: My assistant would come in and she said, here's Mary's card because we just know like clockwork, I'm going to hear from Mary and I sent her things back one time. I sent her a box of stationery and note cards to say thank you for all of your notes.

Stuart Brown: Well again, I really hope people listening to this take this idea to heart and let's give credit to the faculty member.

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: Dr. Delight Champagne retired from the Springfield College Master's program. She was there for many, many years. Many of your listeners have come through Delights' program. I'm sure and know exactly who I'm talking about, especially if you're in the Northeast, in Region One for NASPA. But yes, it was Dr. Delight Champagne.

Stuart Brown: Nancy, thank you so much for sharing this story. I think this is something where we're going to be, you know, going through social media and stuff and I would love when we start posting your episode to put up some hashtags or I don't know, we'll call it the student affairs box or something and I would love for people to be posting pictures of their box.

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: That would be great. So maybe you're starting something. I hope so. But when I posted online about that night recently where I went through everything I posted on my Facebook page and I tagged, I think it was 99 people - Facebook lets you tag, first people from my box, former students in the field that I remain close to in or out of the field, other professionals around the country. And the reaction from that was, oh I remember that Nancy. I have a box. So there are a lot of people out there that have a box because I taught in the Springfield program for a while, that intro course and I always told that story.

Stuart Brown: Nancy, thank you so much for sharing your, your one thing.

Dr. Nancy Crimmin: Thank you.

Stuart Brown: You have been listening to Student Affairs One Thing, the podcast that asks a simple question of season student affairs professionals - what is one thing you have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I've been your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most access websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you'll join us next time for another episode of the Student Affairs One Thing.

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