



**Podcast:** Student Affairs One Thing

**Release Date:** October 10, 2022

**Episode Title:** 24. Dr. Monica Burke

**Summary:** We chat with Dr. Monica Burke, a faculty member in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University.

» [studentaffairs.com/podcast/onething](https://studentaffairs.com/podcast/onething)

## 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've learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, the developer 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 and a wide range of webinars.

I would like to thank our sponsor Alcohol101+, a cost free digital alcohol education program developed by Responsibility.org. Designed to be used by colleges and universities, the course includes interactive and quick paced programming covering core alcohol education topics. Through an administrative dashboard, the program contains tools for institutions to easily roster students, track progress and analyze student metrics. To learn more about Alcohol101+, visit <https://www.alcohol101.plus>.

On today's episode. I am very pleased to have Dr. Monica Burke, a faculty member in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. Welcome to the program Monica.

**Dr. Monica Burke:** Thank you for having me.

**Stuart Brown:** So Monica, what is your one thing?

**Dr. Monica Burke:** My one thing is to take advantage of opportunities while being flexible and I learned that because my path to student affairs was a bit curvy. I worked in student affairs as an undergraduate, as a work study student for four years. but I decided to go in the field of counseling to become a psychologist and ended up doing my graduate studies for my masters. They ran out of assistantships for counseling and they said, hey would you mind working in student affairs? And so I was working two more years in student affairs and while I was working I had the pleasure working for the dean, assistant dean of students, the dean of students and the vice president of student affairs. And the vice president and the dean consistently said you should switch to student affairs and I was like, no, I just really want to be a psychologist and ended up eventually working in the field of mental health. In about a year into it, I said I think I do prefer student affairs so I decided to go back and earn my doctorate in higher education leadership with a concentration in counseling and so that's how I ended up with student affairs. But if I had not listened to other people telling me that I could do it and encouraging me to do it and then provided opportunities to study more and take advantage of opportunities to gain experience in student affairs, I probably wouldn't have done it.

**Stuart Brown:** Isn't it interesting how sort of life's pathways take you down certain roads. So if that program did have enough internships, did have enough placements, you might have never even known, well what exactly is student affairs.

**Dr. Monica Burke:** I knew what it was, but I probably didn't think of it doing this as a career, you know, that I could have a lifelong career in it. And I still got to use my counseling degree in student affairs and I think I enjoy using it the way I use it now as opposed to how I would have done as a psychologist. So I still got what I wanted, but just the package is a little bit different.

**Stuart Brown:** When you switched to student affairs, was it to be an administrator or did you have your sights on a faculty position like you have now?

**Dr. Monica Burke:** It was as an administrator. I started out actually for my first, almost 10 years in the role of an administrator in diversity and that's what I did. And coincidentally I met my colleague my second month at Western, Dr. Aaron Hughey. I was doing some research in my desk and he's like, you would be a great faculty member. You should consider being a faculty member and I was like, I just started this job so he was like just stay in touch and consistently Aaron not did not let up on me. And when the position came open for a teaching adjunct, he's like why don't you just try it out teaching as an adjunct in the department to see if you like it. And I did like it and I was already teaching psychology courses undergraduate as an adjunct and I really enjoy, you know, preparing students for the field. I talked about my experiences and things that I had learned and was learning at the time. The next thing I know a position came open and Aaron encouraged me to apply among other administrators on campus. And, again, fate pushed me into this role. I was hesitant, but I decided to take the opportunity and it led me to a path I truly enjoy.

**Stuart Brown:** I think it's always funny in student affairs, we're always trying to recruit good people. I think what's important is for people listening to the podcast is that the operative word is the opportunities and what presents it to yourself where you are now? This was not where you were as an undergrad and grad. And I think a lot of students probably, I think it's most students ,don't know what they're gonna do when they declare a major or go into a field that people are always changing but that you have to take hold or at least consider those opportunities that are presented to you and to evaluate them because that might be your next career path.

Well, Monica, I want to thank you. I think it is very important that people grasp the golden ring on that merry go round of life and see what is there and you don't always have to take it. But that when opportunities present themselves that they should be considered because you never know what is going to be around that corner.

**Dr. Monica Burke:** And that's why I encourage my students to take advantage of presenting at conferences or writing an article. And in spite of the fear and you never know what that opportunity would give you in the future. So just, you know, take a chance and I tell them my story. Like if I had listened to the vice president for student affairs at the University of Mississippi, if I had not listened to Aaron Hughey, I wouldn't be where I am now. So sometimes, you know, just not letting fear take over completely.

**Stuart Brown:** Actually, I think that's a really good point too, is take chances and the opportunities no matter how small or how big and with your case also you have people there that are supporting you. So it's not you're taking, I don't know why I'm using all these circus metaphors, but going out on that tightrope with no net. Like you're saying, you encourage your students to present at a conference, write a paper, do something, but you're there with them. It's not, they're out on their own. And these are opportunities, especially for people that want to advance themselves in the field, that you have to do sometimes when you get out of your comfort zone.

You have been listening 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 want to thank today's guest Dr. Monica Burke a faculty member in the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. I've been your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of StudentAffairs.com, one of the most accessed websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you will join us next time for another episode of our podcast.

E N D T R A N S C R I P T