



**Podcast:** Student Affairs One Thing

**Release Date:** December 5, 2022

**Episode Title:** 28. Dr. Alan Mueller

**Summary:** We chat with Dr. Alan Mueller, a faculty member in the Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling at Appalachian State 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 have learned that has helped shape your professional career? I'm your host Stuart Brown, the developer of student affairs dot com. One of the most access websites by student affairs professionals. On our pages, we have the most cost effective job postings, listing hundreds of open student services positions and a wide range of webinars on today's episode. I am very pleased to have dr Alan Mueller, a faculty member in the Department of Human Development and psychological counseling at Appalachian State University, Welcome to the program.

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** Thanks so much. Thanks for having me.

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

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** I think the one thing that I wish I had known earlier in my career is allowing students to mess up. I think back to a time when I was working in a student programs office and a student had a talent show facilitate and they were doing the preliminary like auditions for this and they messed up, they just messed up, they forgot to do some paperwork, they didn't have the sound system and it got messy and at the time and some of my colleagues were worried about the messiness.

We were worried about, oh my gosh, the show didn't go off too well in retrospect. And fortunately I think I learned the lesson in real time, but it took me some learning letting that student mess up and letting that student face the fallout from what she had done was a huge growth opportunity for her huge, She went on to become the president of the organization went on to get recognized by the university as one of the top leaders in subsequent years. And so that allowing students to get a little messy.

**Stuart Brown:** I think it was huge. And sometimes the desire for perfection sort of made me forget that college is a giant learning lab and that these students are learning as they're doing. I think that's so important. I know when I was a young professional, I think I was doing some academic advising and I was so proud because I basically did their schedule and I said this to a colleague And they reprimanded me and they said, well, what did that students learn and I step back and agree that yeah, I did not let them mess up or go through all the trials and tribulations of figuring it out themselves.

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** Yeah, 100%. And I think different places I've worked have had different comfort level with giving students latitude and so the ones where I've worked where there's more latitude, even though it's messier on the front end when I see those student over a lifetime and this is one of the privileges of being a seasoned student affairs professionals. You know, I have students, I was advising 20 years ago or reconnecting with me and you get to see the growth in sort of a longitudinal way that you don't always see in the moment. And so sometimes that pays off huge.

**Stuart Brown:** And it's hard because you don't want the students to fail, but you don't also want to disappoint, let's say your superiors, that this event bombed and you're the advisor, you're responsible, etcetera, Et cetera. And it's kind of hard to say, well, this is a growth experience. I want that student to fail and they're just looking at you, shaking their head. Well, no, maybe that's not what we wanted to do here.

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** And particularly when safety is at hand and also when ethics and so that same student, I think maybe a year later asked me if I was advising the activities board and they wanted to get beta fish as a giveaway for the campus campus of 16,000 students. And I said to the student, I said, you know, normally I let y'all do what you're gonna do and I just advise and coach and as long as you're not setting things on fire, I will

sit back. But in this instance, I want to preserve the lives of the 500 beta fish, that six weeks from now would be dead. And so, you know, I said no. And then of course what happened was I left the institution and the next advisor was like, yeah, sure, let's get beta fish and just given to the students for me, there was an ethical line there, where, you know, when it comes to ethics, when it comes to safety, those are those places where, okay, the learning lab is over. We need to make a bigger decision here. But in those instances where it's a talent show or where the stakes are a little bit lower. This is a great time for students to practice because post college practices over post college, the consequences get steeper quickly.

**Stuart Brown:** I think when we deal with students, that is also an important point because we want to protect them, we want to provide that safety net, but we're also providing that training for the quote unquote real world. And there are so many aspects of college where we want to protect the students, but we always have to think, well when you get out of college, you're not necessarily going to have that, that safety net. And I think what you said is a good point. That may be sort of the low risk to let them fail, but then also to talk to them about it to really process that with them. So they understand, they understand deadlines are not guidelines, that safety is important and all the these things. So hopefully when they graduate, but also as they progress in their college experience, they become the new leaders because they had that, oops moment.

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** Very much so and also recognizing the impact of their mistake on the community. And so like I think about my colleagues who do student conduct and I've been involved in conduct areas where there's a restorative justice model where the question is okay, you messed up. So let's not wring our hands and beat you over the head with it. Let's talk about the neck, that's part of the process to make better for your community, let's reflect on who was impacted and let's see if we can do better. And so again outside of college post college, those opportunities are few and far between because usually if you've messed up, you messed up and consequences are very real and sudden.

**Stuart Brown:** Alan I want to thank you for sharing your one thing. This is something that is important, but like I said, it's hard because on paper it sounds good in a meeting, it sounds good, but when push comes to shove there are a lot of other individuals, let's say on campus that you have to answer to. So it is a balancing act.

**Dr. Alan Mueller:** It definitely is. And thank you so much for your time. And as I say, you know, the difficult part of student affairs is why we make the some bucks, not the big bucks, but the some bucks to get in that gap to be in that gap with those students and to make the difficult calls sometimes for the benefit of their learning and sometimes for just safety and ethics.

**Stuart Brown:** You have been listening to Student Affairs One Thing, a podcast that asks a simple 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 Alan Mueller, a faculty member in the Department of Human Development and Psychological counseling at Appalachian State University. I've been your host, Stuart Brown, the developer of student affairs dot com, one of the most access websites by student affairs professionals. I hope you'll join us next time for another episode of Student Affairs One Thing.

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