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## Student affairs

No! Sorry, this isn't a sordid set of tales about student love affairs as interesting as they might be for increasing the circulation of *TCFNews*! *Student affairs* is the new term appearing in the literature, especially in tertiary education, for student wellbeing which was once student welfare. There could be endless debate about why these terms have changed over the years, except to say that the field is broadening and as mental health issues get more attention in our society, student affairs is as good a catchall as any other, despite its obvious literal romantic meaning.

The term seems to have origins in the USA and in a recent article in the *International Journal of Christianity and Education*, *Does God make a difference for student affairs? Emerging student affairs in the Christian story*, Perry L Glanzer and three others from the Baylor University, Waco, Texas decided to answer this question by researching the student affairs literature related to Catholic and Protestant tertiary institutions, to find where God gets a mention. More specifically, they wanted to discover how leaders writing about student affairs overtly connect theology and the Biblical narrative to their work.

Their report makes for interesting reading and an application to the Australian context is a worthy pursuit for *TCF News*.

## The theology of student affairs

In looking for Christian distinctiveness, the question *Who are we?* is foundational. In the creation narrative, humans are created in the image of God. Each is a unique individual loved by God giving them intrinsic worth. Humans are also in a binary relationship of male and female as normative although one might acknowledge that this too, like everything else is corrupted, in the Fall. Humans are given the responsibility of being caretakers of the earth and because God is trinitarian they live in community with God and with each other. In these four aspects of creation there are huge implications for how Christians will treat others and how they will reflect God.

Being created in the image of God, all students are of value and this ought to be taught explicitly and modelled in relationships. But the Biblical narrative continues with the Fall and the story of God's redemption and restoration. Acknowledgement of sin and its effects on our relationship with God and with each other need recognition if we are to understand redemption and Jesus' sacrifice to allow that redemption.

## What the research found

The key findings were:

1. Significant emphasis was placed on God the creator and humans being in his image.
2. Less emphasis was placed on the Fall and that this *hinders the ability of student affairs practitioners to speak God's wisdom and grace.*
3. The lack of emphasis on the Fall and Restoration also has implications for how Christians in educational settings view their relationships with each other. Are they the restored body of Christ in a unique community?
4. Only in those authors who had a focus on discipline did the Fall have a prominent place.
5. Other writers saw the goal of student affairs to *follow and model Christ.*
6. Some, including the authors, argued that these different goals should be brought together.
7. Christian affairs scholar-practitioners shared a vision that involved sharing and modelling a Trinitarian community of character involving commonly accepted virtues and values often referred to as Kingdom values.
8. Catholic practitioners saw the sacraments as important for a disciplined Christian life whereas Protestants, although sharing the same outlook, focused on how God is reflected in every aspect of life and the practices that contribute to this awareness.
9. In examining practices, it was noted that most are not uniquely Christian, but the Christian brings an additional perspective that changes or embellished the practice. For example, mentoring leads to discipling.
10. Some practices were uniquely Christian including prayer.

## Implications for Christian campuses in Australia

In Australia, tertiary institutions comprise Catholic universities, private universities, theological colleges offering degree courses and, in most of our major universities, student colleges, many of them faith based or associated.

In explicitly Christian affiliated institutions, approaches to student affairs ought to be influenced by the theology of their faith base. Some have open enrolment policies which can compromise their student affairs with secular values, while theological colleges have strict enrolment policies giving them greater control over the students. They are sometimes criticised as being narrow and cult-like.

In recent years, student colleges in secular universities have come under greater media attention and behaviours that have brought student colleges into disrepute with allegations of bullying, initiations, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse have been highlighted. In the midst of this, student affairs workers have been trying to manage the faith base of the college and the students it has enrolled. But not all of their student affairs workers share the faith base of the college that employs them.

While solutions to their problems lie mainly in their administrative procedures regarding enrolment criteria, behaviour codes and discipline procedures, it is worth reflecting on the research findings above for the Australian context.

The question is: Has the work of student affairs practitioners associated with these institutions been compromised by:

- a lack of commitment to the faith that underpins them
- allowing secular values and nonfaith-based colleagues to permeate their institution

- succumbing to socially dominant secular and humanist philosophies in an attempt to be open and accommodating of the social trends of the day?

The research of Glanzer et al above, could give some insights. While there is a very important role for Christians to play in secular institutions and is discussed in the next section, there is a danger of Christian institutions employing people who do not share the same faith. Without a knowledge of God and how he works in the lives of individuals, a student affairs practitioner can only draw on secular experience and theory to assist a student. While this can be helpful, not addressing the real issue of sin and its effects and the restoration that comes through Jesus Christ is at the core of most problems. Christians recognise this and the power of forgiveness to motivate life through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the recognition of who God is, how we are created in his image, sin and its impact on that relationship and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the student affairs practitioner is not equipped to do more than address the symptoms of problems or to direct solutions which, while helpful, do not reach the crux of the matter.

While the proposed freedom of religion bill might still be controversial and need further adjustment, the right of faith-based institutions to hire staff that are followers of that faith must be respected or they will end up *conforming to the pattern of this world*.

Glanzer's acknowledgement of the emphasis on God the creator and lack of emphasis on sin and restoration has further implications. An emphasis on being created in the image of God can lead to emphasizing a theology of following Christ and his teachings to reflect the image of God. This emphasis can align too easily with humanism where humans are seen to be good and the aim is to bring that goodness to the fore. It can lead to comprise with the world and focussing on right moral behaviours as defined by a particular society or social group. Truth is found in the nature of God and in Christ the perfect reflection (image) of God and not in secular moral codes, even if they have a acknowledged historic faith base.

### **Reflection of student affairs in secular institutions.**

Secular institutions provide a range of practitioners to assist students. In a pluralistic society Christians can be employed in these institutions and have opportunity for their faith to shine through. Christians are in foreign territory and ambassadors for Christ. Christians working in secular institutions need to be good at their job so that they earn respect. When it comes to how their faith is expressed in their work five aspects come to mind:

1. Be faithful - live out the life God has called you to by reflecting his nature in all you do, knowing that at times you will fail and need to seek forgiveness. Don't be tentative, but bold in your relationships with staff and students.
2. Give an account of your faith when asked, but do not dump it on colleagues and students not expecting it as this can lead to alienation from both students and colleagues.
3. Make your position and its faith base known even when unpopular. Colleagues and students need to know your opinion and the basis for it. To influence decisions, your opinions need to be part of the mix.
4. As ambassadors, try to be involved in disagreement and conjecture so that you have the opportunity to witness and influence others. You cannot be the *salt of the earth* if you avoid conflict.
5. Don't proselytise - allow conversations to develop naturally and take up opportunities.

Student affairs practitioners have a wonderful opportunity to help students through some of the most perplexing periods of their lives. Christians in this field have the advantage of understanding God's plan and their place in it. Sharing this with students must be considered a privilege in serving God.

John Gore

## Prayer Points

Robyn Thomas has kindly agreed to formulate prayer points for each edition of *TCF News*. Thank you Robyn for your contribution to this task.

If you would like to add any, educational related points, for members to pray for, please do not hesitate to email them to the office.

Robyn sent the following points on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Our world has changed a lot in the last month!

### Pray for:

- teachers, students and parents in fire affected and drought areas, remembering those especially who have had to change schools.
- churches in these areas as they support and reach out to others.
- Christian teachers and students in public schools - for acceptance of their beliefs and mutual respect with non Christians.
- Christian parents of children in public schools as they interact with staff and other parents.
- wisdom for the government to make the right decision in relation to protecting students, teachers and school personnel from Coronavirus.
- **Give thanks** for the many Scripture Union Family Mission programs during summer and pray for effective follow up where appropriate. Also thank God for his protection of the teams that were threatened and evacuated during the bushfires.

### A prayer for the current Coronavirus threats

In the light of the drought, bushfires and now the Coronavirus:

Hear this, you elders:

listen, all who live in the land.

Has anything like this ever happened in your days  
or in the days of your ancestors? Joel 1:2

Lord, we come before you knowing that the world is not as you created it and that through sin - death, decay and disease have their rule. As the Corona virus takes hold in many countries, including our own, we pray for governments everywhere to make wise decisions to mitigate the impact of the virus on communities. Give doctors and researchers the insights and resources they need to bring relief and especially protect those who work in healthcare.

Lord, we know that you can turn anything to good to bring about your purposes, so we pray that the frailty of human life shown by this threat might be recognised widely and, as the things of this world grow less important, that people might turn to you. We pray that those who don't know you will understand that there is a bigger picture that involves knowing

you and coming to Jesus for forgiveness and true restoration to life eternal. We pray that throughout this pandemic, Jesus be lifted up to shine as certain hope to all people.

And as your people Lord, we want to pray that you will help us to be even more generous during this period of social dislocation and loss of employment. Help us to recognise and respond to people in need, especially those who are most vulnerable - the elderly, the sick and those with low immunity. May we be prepared to support those who will lose jobs, especially casual workers in industries like travel, tourism, hospitality, entertainment and retail. And while we take sensible precautions ourselves, help us to overcome fear and not panic but trust in your eternal goodness comforted by knowing always that our true home and rest is with you.

As Jesus said: *Come to me, all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*

Amen

## Turning the tables on rote learning

$3 \times 4 = 12$ ,  $3 \times 5 = 15$ ,  $3 \times 6 = 18$  etc

I remember the days of learning my tables and now in the twilight of my life I appreciate the memorisation and repetition that gave me an increased ability to do mental arithmetic. But not all memorisation is good. I recall two incidents in India, in one a teacher wanted to show me how her Kindergarten students had mastered numbers one to five. She held up one pencil and the students said one, she held up two pencils and the students said two etc. I asked if I could have a turn and held up two pencils and the students all said one. There was not much mathematics learning going on. On a second occasion a 1<sup>st</sup> Grade class was asked to show me how they had learnt the alphabet. They recited the alphabet perfectly, but when I pointed to the letter “n” on an alphabet chart they had no idea which one it was. Reciting the alphabet had little to do with learning to read.

In recent years, rote learning (memorising) has rightly come into disrepute as constructivist theories and meaningful learning models have challenged the long established place of memorisation. Both curriculum writers and high stakes examiners like in the HSC have been accused of favouring rote learning so that students with the best memories always bubble to the top.

Rote learning as a memorisation technique based on repetition is from the idea that one will be able to quickly recall the important knowledge the more one repeats it. Rote learning is one of the best learning styles in an examination oriented educational system. But it doesn't allow for a deeper understanding, does not facilitate the connection between new and previous knowledge and can result in misunderstanding concepts.

However, students who learn to focus and develop their working memory through memorisation tasks can free their mind to become more creative. As one educator said *it means you have a great memory and that makes it easier to be smart*. But intelligence is more than memory.

In the rush to adopt constructivist theories and meaningful learning models the place of memorisation can be overlooked. Students can benefit from learning their mathematics tables but knowing the sequence of the rivers of NSW would seem of little value with the availability of resources to answer such questions. Yet, an understanding of place can be

very important for students to understand the political/geophysical structure of their world and help them understand world events.

Teaching for understanding has never been more important, but all educators need to understand how memorisation of some knowledge can facilitate that learning.

From all reports our best students go into an international setting where their Australian education and learning skills are valued despite the recently published results from international testing. Perhaps some countries, higher on this international scale, rely more on rote learning and in the end their students are not really ahead. Knowing how to use rote learning within broader teaching models can be an asset to students learning.

John Gore

## Dates for your Diary:

AGM Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Getaway at Stanwell Tops Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July to Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

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