

# Strengthening Catholic Identity

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## 10TH OF A SERIES: STUDENT AFFAIRS



When people talk about higher education, they often refer to “student learning” as it pertains only to the academic enterprise. In fact, college students spend much of their time learning *outside* the classroom. This aspect of learning—from residential life, to recreation, to student organizations, to healthy choices, to career planning and services—represents the important focus of Student Affairs professionals.

At a Catholic college or university, Student Affairs is especially distinct, as we seek through programs and services to develop our students spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically in the context of Catholic values and Christian community. We encourage our students to learn about themselves and the world around them by taking into account the spiritual dimension of what it means to be a good and

moral citizen, to lead ethically, to care for the common good, and to know and love God.

## Principles of Good Practice

In 2007, a group of committed practitioners from leading Catholic colleges and universities published *The Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities*. The publication offers a blueprint for Student Affairs practice in Catholic higher education, complementing the academic pursuit. The practices are based on eight essential principles that serve as the foundation for what we do. In Catholic higher education, the division of Student Affairs:

1. Welcomes all students into a vibrant campus community that celebrates God’s love for all.
2. Grounds policies, practices, and decisions in the teachings and living tradition of the Church.
3. Enriches student integration of faith and reason through the provision of co-curricular learning opportunities.
4. Creates opportunities for students to experience, reflect upon, and act from a commitment to justice, mercy, and compassion, and in light of Catholic Social Teaching to develop respect and responsibility for all, especially those most in need.
5. Challenges students to high standards of personal behavior and responsibility through the formation of character and virtues.
6. Invites and accompanies students into the life of the Catholic Church through prayer, liturgy, sacraments, and spiritual direction.
7. Seeks dialogue among religious traditions with contemporary culture to clarify beliefs and to foster mutual understanding in the midst of tensions and ambiguities.

8. Assists students in discerning and responding to their vocations, understanding potential professional contributions, and choosing particular career directions.

## Programs to Foster Personal Growth

Student Affairs provides students with the opportunity to learn and develop outside the classroom through involvement with co-curricular programs and activities. Professional staff and interested faculty who are dedicated to Catholic identity and values come together to embrace students and develop their potential. The students themselves assume vital leadership positions that enrich the collegiate experience for the entire community. This co-curricular involvement fosters the growth of the total person, one who builds community, values differences, leads ethically, and serves others.



These programs enhance campus life for everyone. Student involvement on a Catholic campus taps into the strong traditions of Catholic Social Teaching, in which servant leadership, the common good, and care for God's creation always have a place in the conversation.

As a result, Student Affairs programs on Catholic campuses seek to:

- Build residential and campus communities grounded in Gospel values.
- Develop the whole person—intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally—with a commitment to knowledge and growth that endures beyond the college experience.
- Develop active participation in community and a sense of personal responsibility to that community.
- Enrich the liturgical and prayer life of students and the campus community.
- Nurture discernment, faith formation, and respect for all faith traditions.
- Integrate the value of local and global service that emphasizes care for the poor and marginalized.
- Develop students in multicultural competency, political awareness, and social justice principles.
- Enhance skills that facilitate meaningful relationships and effective communication with others.
- Encourage healthy practices grounded in care and respect for the human person.

Consider these goals as a checklist to assess the quality of Student Affairs programming on your campus.

## Services to Care for Student Well Being

Student Affairs cares for both the physical and emotional dimensions of the person. Student health centers provide medical care and follow-up for students, who are often away from home for the first time. Confidential counseling centers help students navigate the complexity of being a young adult and the many pressures that today's society presents. Catholic colleges and universities are well-positioned to treat the whole person, to bring parents and families into the conversation as appropriate, and to respond caringly when issues arise.

In addition to health services, Student Affairs educates students on healthy decision making within a framework of Catholic values. We are able to talk about decision making around alcohol, drugs, and sexual activity within the context of the sacredness of the human person. Students are often challenged to make wise decisions; the goal of Student Affairs is to offer a life-affirming model to which students can turn when making their choices.

## The Full Person

Student Affairs is the complement to the academic pursuit during the transformative experience of college. In Catholic higher education, Student Affairs develops the whole person in a rich and integrated manner as befits our Catholic tradition. We talk about God; we nurture the religious and spiritual development of our students and our staff. We emphasize the common good, a virtuous life, and respectful choices based on a higher purpose. The Gospel message of loving one another is at the heart of what we do each day.



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