

Katie Lowitzki

Action Plan: Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference

CSA 543

November 5, 2004

**Action Plan Based on Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference**

The Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference taught me a lot about various legal concerns pertaining to matters that I deal with while working in student life. I went to sessions on “Equal Opportunity in Higher Education after the Michigan Cases”, campus climate in the context of diversity, eating disorders, student hearings, sexual harassment, mental health issues, dealing with parents, and academic dishonesty. Although many of the sessions that I attended dealt with topics relevant to my job in student life, I also was able to learn about both administrative and academic perspectives on subjects including cheating and FERPA. As part of the sessions, I had the opportunity to interact with administration and legal counsel from many institutions. I enjoyed talking with people and hearing about how student issues are being handled by institutions across the country.

As a result of attending this conference, I was assured that Azusa Pacific University (APU) is doing many things similarly to other universities; though, there are still areas that I believe need improvement. This conference provided valuable information that I can apply to my job as a Residence Director. In the next few pages, I will explain some aspects of various sessions that I believe directly impact how I will go about my job and changes that I hope to see implemented within our Department of Residence Life. Although there are many things that I would like to research more or change because of what I learned at this conference, I will focus on two areas in which I would like to take some specific action steps: distressed students and dealing with parents.

One of the sessions that had the greatest impact on me focused on distressed students. It was very helpful to hear what other schools are doing in an effort to help students who may be harmful to themselves and others. Although I have experience in dealing with distressed students, I feel that there are always things that I am learning and could do better—both

personally and within our Residence Life Department. There are several action steps that I plan to take as a result of my learning in this session.

First, I want to continue researching and learning about the protocols that other universities use for cases such as suicidal ideation, drugs, alcohol, and student death. I will look into information and try to find resources that support the need for changes within our department. In particular, I believe that the Department of Residence Life needs more detailed protocols for how to approach and deal with distressing students. After researching the protocols of other institutions, I will talk with my supervisor about the changes that I would like to see happen. By taking tangible information to him, I hope to have an open conversation about the protocols and training that we need to have available for the Resident Directors at APU. A third step that I want to take is making myself available to help develop protocols and training models for issues such as student death, suicidal students, and alcohol/drug use. One of the ideas that was presented at the conference was that of a “student assistant’s coordinating committee”. This committee is made up of both student affairs professionals and faculty. They meet once a month to deal with students who take too much time from many different departments on campus. This committee works to assign a case manager for students so that a student will only be able to talk with a specific faculty or staff member. This is one idea that I may like to try and implement at APU in some format. I think it is great to have student life working with faculty. I also see many benefits of this committee in that they can help control people getting walked on and add consistency to how a student is dealt with.

The second session that I took a lot away from centered on how to deal with parents. This seminar was particularly relevant to my job as an RD. Often, I have parents call to ask questions about their children, tell me about their concerns, or talk to me about whatever else may be on their minds. During this session, the presenters talked about the different stages that

parents go through in adjusting to separation from their children, the definition of “millennial” students, ways to try and get parents involved, and parent programs on campus. “Millennial” students are characterized by their close relationship with their parents; this means that parents often want to be involved in the daily lives of their children, even after they have gone to college. The presenters also addressed legal issues surrounding how to talk with and approach parents, especially in terms of FERPA.

The first action step that I intend to take as a result of my learning is to talk with some of my co-workers about how they interact with parents. I want to better understand the issues and concerns that parents have when they call an RD. After talking with my co-workers, I want to talk with my supervisor and discuss what I have learned—both in the session and by talking with other RDs. One of the ideas that the presenters talked about was creating a parent program on campus; this program consists of orientation sessions for parents, websites helping parents find information, newsletters, e-mail contact, invitations to parent weekends and events, and information about commencement and other student awards. I would like to talk with my peers and supervisor about how a parent program could work at APU and how the Office of Residence Life could partner with other offices to help meet the needs of parents. I also want to talk with my supervisor about how FERPA applies to conversations that I have with parents. In the generation of “millennial” students, dealing with parents is one area that I would love to initiate more training on for the RDs.

The Legal Issues in Higher Education Conference helped me see from a new perspective how to approach student life concerns and issues. I enjoyed the sessions, the people, and the University of Vermont. I want to challenge myself to take what I learned and share it with others. This paper lays out the action steps that I hope to take, and is just the beginning of the learning and growth that I know I will experience as I pursue my career in student affairs.

