A Life of Purpose

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Defining Purpose

The PLC accepts as foundational that developing purpose is an exploratory task for college students which evolves over time. Specifically, developing purpose is an approach to thinking broadly about life in ways that encompass vocational plans and aspirations as well as personal interests and interpersonal and family commitments. The college experience can help students grapple with how to reconcile the personal and the professional and how to create a meaningful life (Braskamp, et al, 2008), though purpose and meaning are overlapping concepts. Glanzer, Hill, and Johnson (2017) note that "Among higher education scholars, however, there is not a clearly developed practice regarding how to differentiate [meaning from purpose]" (114). One reason for this is the difference between the focus on how students actually define meaning and purpose in their own lives and how students engage in "the process of meaning-making or purpose development" (Glanzer et al, 2017, 114). Both are important areas of investigation, but studying the latter at the expense of the former ignores how many students already come to the university with their own sense of their purpose and meaning.

Vocation / Purpose in Work

There is a continuum of meaning and purpose in work. College should help students acquire decent work at a minimum (Duffy et al, 2018), would ideally help them create a life of meaningful work, and may, in some cases, enable students to respond to a perceived calling to use work itself as a source of purpose and meaning (Dik and Duffy, 2009). The PLC contends that SOU should support student skill development and work aspirations in the middle of this range—to find work that has both personal meaning and societal relevance without necessarily being a response to an external summons.

How Students Define Their Purpose

Beyond defining purpose on a conceptual level, current college students typically have a sense of what meaning and purpose are to them. Glanzer et al (2017) note that "almost all students already have at least provisional answers to the question of what makes their life meaningful" (p. 135) and the same is true of students' sense of purpose. From qualitative research with college students, Glanzer et al (2017) found three general categories of purpose: self-achievers, relationalists, and transcendents. Some students "focus[ed] on only one purpose," but many combined two, three, or more aspects of purpose, often linked.

These three general categories of purpose were broken down in to 11 subcategories. Self-achievers associated their sense of purpose with personal successes, including a sense of purpose with their careers, their personal happiness, creative accomplishments, their experiences, and/or material goods and money. Material goods and money were only less often mentioned, and when addressed, were most frequently attached to another category. Relationalists included students whose sense of purpose is linked to their relationships with others, those who found their purpose through service toward others or through love, through their family, and through their friends. Transcendents found their sense of purpose linked to a greater or higher power, such as through God or religion, others through changing the world for good, and still others through civic involvement. Using these 11 categories, Glanzer et al conducted a national survey of college students. From this qualitative study (N=2503), they found that students were more likely to state that categories such as happiness, experiences, and friendships were part of their life's purpose, and students were less likely to state that categories such as material goods and money, creative accomplishments, and God and religion were part of their life's purpose (Glanzer et al, 2017, p. 147).

In addition to these findings, while most college students have a sense of their purpose or what purpose means to them, some students were working on their sense purpose, who Glanzer called "questers." Thus, based on these findings, the role of a university is not only to help students 'find' their purpose. Many, including questers, already have a vague or even specific ideas about both their sense of meaning and sense of purpose. Instead, Glanzer et al suggest that college faculty and staff help students think of critical ways students construct and discover their source of meaning (Glazner et al, 2017).

Faculty Role in Helping Students Define Purpose

Faculty play a role in helping students to explore meaning and purpose, even if students already enter the university with a sense of what these concepts mean to them. However, Eagan et al (Glanzer, Hill, and Johnson, 2017) found that faculty at public universities were less likely to note that important learning objectives and goals for undergraduates included helping students to develop values, to commit to community service, to develop a moral character, and to teach diversity of beliefs compared to faculty at other types of institutions. Exploring these topics through curriculum can often help students to think more critically about what purpose means to them. While faculty at public universities report lower likelihood of stating these as important goals, it's also true that "most American college professors still share the belief that colleges or universities should help students explore the meaning and purpose of life" (p. 36). Despite a general decrease in this belief among faculty over time, they argue that a sense of purpose should be understood as a "developmental asset" to be addressed through the university (p. 65).

Why Purpose Matters

The psychological literature on purpose suggests the presence of purpose itself is beneficial. As reported in Glanzer, et. al. (2016), "[s]imply believing one has a sense of purpose

in life is associated with a variety of positive life and developmental outcomes" (p. 66). In addition, Glazner et al found that programs which explore purpose increase retention and graduation rates. DeWitz et al (2009) measure risk for leaving school using Victor Frankl's concept of purpose in life along with Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. These authors suggest that schools can develop interventions based on self-efficacy and purpose in life to create a more positive college experience and increase graduation rates.

Marginalized Students

Beyond general reasons that a sense of purpose matters for students, some studies suggest that it may be particularly important for marginalized students. For instance, Glanzer et al (2017) found that black and hispanic students were more likely than white students to indicate their support for every category of purpose in their study. Other studies also indicate the importance of purpose to marginalized students. McGee et al's (2016) investigation of the experiences of black engineering students found that those who succeed often had particular motivation, including "an unyielding passion for their particular discipline, [and] a sense of responsibility to serve marginalized peoples and society" (p. 1). Additionally, a study of first generation college students' (FGS) experience with work post-college found that although many FGS struggled with finding a sense of vocation through their work, "passion is an important factor in their relationship with their work and career" (Olson, 2016, 367).

Leadership Development Field: Developing Values for a Life of Purpose

Research suggests that a conscious focus on personal values is essential for a clear sense of purpose. According to the Social Change Model of Leadership, for example, to create strong positive social change (a purpose) one must make a commitment to be conscious of themselves and propel themselves forward in a congruent manner (live by one's values). The book *Thriving*

in Business and Life (2017) explains the dynamic between different sets of values which helps to lay the groundwork for how individuals function. These values include freedom and integrity, or can be aspirational values, meaning a wishful thinking of a higher state of oneself. The difficult part of values arises between values that are stated and values that are truly integrated into our lives. The crux of the values issues becomes apparent when stated values and lived values do not align. In order to align values, one needs to evaluate how well those values—whether stated, lived, borrowed, or aspirational—are integrated into daily life.

It is through the evaluation and realignment process that individuals become clear about what matters most to them so they can live a thriving life. If an individual live an authentic life and lead from that position of strength, they are better able to develop key relationships with friends, colleagues, employees; and possibly even mentor others to joyous achievement by leading with their talents, gifts and purpose in life (Craig and Snook, 2014).

The combination of all our individual beliefs, values, and strengths guide the principles by which we live our lives. How one purposefully creates a fulfilling life and the role of possibility can play a powerful role in the creation of our life. The personal knowing that we are contributing to our lives and in our community sparks passion (Zander and Zander, 2000). Knowledge of our purpose allows the space to live a happier, fulfilled, and accomplished life by leading our life through meaningful work. Cesar (2006) indicates that the key to achievement is having the discipline to create a model of happiness and following that purpose and visioning process with consistent review, renew and recommit process that aligns your values as life expands.

History of Liberal Arts and Purpose

Many academics would say that one of the chief roles of a liberal arts education was to help students develop a sense of purpose and an understanding of how they could contribute in the world (Glanzer & Hill, 2013). However, the role of a liberal arts education has changed greatly over years. In that shift, perhaps the focus on developing lives of purpose has been lost or redirected. Many authors, citing the rise in the costs of higher education and the need for the economy to gain suitable workers, note that the emphasis of a university education on primarily preparing graduates for the workforce has grown tremendously throughout the latter 20th and early 21st centuries (Berrett, 2015; Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2008; Glanzer & Hill, 2013).

Research and anecdotal observation from academia point to different reasons and trends that have led to the diminishment of liberal arts education in general and its mission in developing students sense of purpose. Some authors take a historical perspective emphasizing the purpose of religiously-founded colleges and universities with their explicit focus on morality, philosophy and entertaining questions of the good life, i.e. meaning and purpose in life (Glanzer & Hill, 2013). Others assert that the tension between liberal arts and 'vocationalism' has been around since the early 19th century when newer vocational schools began drawing more students (Horowitz, 2005). Researchers contend that the eventual "nationalization" of higher education via state universities (which educate 3/4ths of US students) has led to a diminishment of teaching students a humanistic sense of purpose and instead, focused increasingly on universities meeting the needs of society via an implicit social contract for productive workers and citizens (Glanzer & Hill, 2013).

Kronman (in Glanzer & Hill, 2013) blames the rise and fall of secular humanism and the humanities, in particular, for giving up on exploring the big questions, due to the rise of empiricism, questioning of the legitimacy of the question and the authority of teachers to ask it (Glanzer & Hill, 2013, 290). Kronman points to how the religious authority of many early colleges afforded them the role to raise questions of meaning, God, purpose, etc., which secular humanism ably took on as the overt religious/spiritual pursuits in higher education seemed to wane. Kronman contends that secular humanism's decline has meant that many private and most public institutions of higher education no longer possessed the moral authority and perhaps the tools to entertain the essential questions (Glanzer & Hill, 2013).

Another important point raised by the Glanzer & Hill (2013) involves the rise of empiricism, based on the the model of the German research university with its emphasis on empirically derived knowledge, academic specialization, and research, which eventually led to the "deliberate divorce of scientific fact from human values" (p. 291-292). The consequence of this such that the humanities became the last fields that could continue to entertain questions of human meaning and purpose. The authors assert that the social sciences would eventually follow the natural sciences in trying to prove objective facts or theories and be more practical in order to contribute to the country's emerging economic and social needs especially in fields like economics, psychology, sociology and political science (Glanzer & Hill, 2013). With the disappearance of the moral philosophy capstone in the 1960s which had been a university hallmark since their advent and the reduction in philosophy and ethics as a general education requirement, many students did not take a single course that involved asking the big questions regarding meaning and purpose. When the natural and social sciences introduced ethics courses beginning in the 1960s and 70s, they were more narrowly focused within the specific discipline

thus further depriving many students of a course that might entertain questions of meaning and purpose (Glanzer & Hill, 2013).

Those in the liberal arts academy assert that the mission of the liberal arts has become muddled and their value has decreased in society's view over the years, in favor of the pragmatic and career-minded (Sorum, 2005). Berrett notes that the shift towards the job-preparation outcomes of a college education have grown tremendously over time. Students seem to have followed the changing conventional wisdom about a college education. He notes that in the 1970s, 3/4ths of freshmen said they wanted to develop a meaningful philosophy of life and only 1/3rd wanted to be well off financially. In 2015, those fractions have flip-flopped. Adding to this emphasis on making money are the various economic challenges and downturns that students have observed and experienced. Furthermore, the return of non-traditional students, more economically and culturally diverse students, and first-generation students - alongside the rising costs of tuition have increased the pressure on a college education to have been worthwhile financially, i.e. landing a well-paying job after graduation. In 1980, the business major became the most popular college major and has held that position ever since (Berritt, 2015). Lastly, the influence of the free-market on universities, with students becoming savvier and more demanding customers and universities having to attend to their own funding and bottom lines represents a significant challenge to liberal education.

Liberal Arts and Purpose in the Present

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) remains one of the leading organizations that promotes the value of a liberal arts education. As part of their work, they have initiated and supported two programs that have a bearing on developing purpose in liberal arts education. In *Bringing Theory To Practice* (BTTOP) established in 2003 by the AAC&U, there is considerable evidence that the intentional practice of incorporating goals and

ideals of liberal education with deep and experiential learning leads to personal benefits for students and for civic society. This excerpt from their mission statement highlights the interrelationship between these domains, "... We believe that undergraduate education should be holistic and transformative, nurturing active and integrative learning, personal well-being, preparation for meaningful work, and democratic citizenship." (Bringing Theory to Practice, 2019).

Additionally, the AAC&U has championed the practicality and mutual benefits of experiential learning, deep engaged learning and nurturing responsibility along with the other tenets of liberal education in it's LEAP program. LEAP, launched in 2005 by AAC&U, stands for Liberal Education and America's Promise and has led many campus initiatives and larger advocacy on the integration of liberal education and preparing students to be both desirable employees and engaged civic participants. Both LEAP and BTTOP discuss the importance of developing students' sense of purpose though it may not be the most obviously advertised benefit or outcome of their programs. Donald Harward, a LEAP and BTTOP leader advocates that all institutions of higher education must engage their students in the big questions such as how to create a meaningful life, how to become an engaged citizen, and how to be the best version of one's self (Harward, 2016, p. 1).

It is interesting to note that LEAP does not mention developing a sense of purpose in its Essential Learning Outcomes (EAL) within the section where it might best be located. After reviewing first-hand campus accounts and writings from LEAP leaders, it seems that they value students developing a sense of civic responsibility and relatedly, a more holistic sense of purpose, but they do not elevate it to the status of an EAL. The AAC&U and its various initiatives (LEAP, BTTOP, etc.) have extensive real-world evidence and successful strategies

that might be gleaned for possible implementation at SOU. It seems that AAC&U has successfully carried the banner for integrating the ideals of a liberal arts education with the real-world skills that employers and society desire in the 21st century. It remains incumbent on each institution of higher education to articulate how their curricular and co-curricular offerings also serve the dual and integrated purposes that AAC&U is advocating for the liberal arts.

Lastly, there has arisen a substantive literature (**see appendix/resources**) addressing how colleges and universities can best help to develop a sense of purpose or meaning within their students. Again, it is noteworthy that many of these efforts have most readily sprung forth in traditional liberal arts colleges and often, religiously-affiliated colleges and universities (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2008). These reports of successful programs seem to be transferable to most any institution but researchers, practitioners, and leaders are consistent that these efforts include a concerted and integrated effort across the institution that is not simple to achieve. These programs also recognize and support the developmental needs of college students and the responsibility of the entire institution to meet those student needs as well (AAC&U, 2019; Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2008).

How SOU Addresses Purpose Now

A cursory review of SOU's current practices was conducted to assess the extent to which the SOU vision of helping all learners "create lives of purpose" is articulated across campus. University guiding documents and websites were reviewed, in addition to email and in-person communication with several campus administrators and faculty.

Overall, few guiding documents and frameworks for curriculum currently contain explicitly articulated goals or outcomes related to creating and defining a life of purpose, though there is evidence that change is underway. In Strategic Direction I, Goal One of the new SOU

Strategic Plan, it states that "SOU will develop curriculum and provide learning experiences that prepare all learners . . . to think critically, innovate boldly, and create lives of purpose." In communication with faculty and administrators involved with updating SOU's University Studies, University Seminar, and other curriculum, it appears that work to align curriculum with the new vision is ongoing.

At the individual course level, learning outcomes related to defining and creating lives of purpose are more often expressed. Many University Seminar courses include learning outcomes that connect with this disposition. Furthermore, many programs of study include one or more required courses where students are asked to reflect on their values and life aspirations and how they connect to their course of study. For example, introductory courses such as PSY 211 and CCJ 298, and Capstone courses such as SOAN 414, and PSY 498/499. A number of elective courses also engage students in exploration of their personal values and connection to career and life ambitions, for example UGS 299: Major & Career Explorations.

Outside the classroom, co-curricular engagement and career and major advising are other areas where students may have the chance to articulate their values and life purpose in order to best prepare for a satisfying career and personal life. Here, again, little evidence was found of specific goals and intended outcomes pertaining to this vision at the unit level. However, similar to our review of SOU's academic offerings, individual program offerings present a multitude of opportunities for students to explore this topic. For example, Student Life professionals provide trainings and workshops for student employees and student leaders with related learning outcomes, and the Career Preparation Coordinator and Student Success Coordinators often engage students in exploring their purpose and values in the course of advising students toward appropriate major and career pathways.

What is clear from this review is that many opportunities currently exist at SOU for students and learners to reflect on, define and work toward creating a life of purpose. It is also clear that currently very few areas, if any, specifically articulate related goals and outcomes in their guiding frameworks.

Curriculum

Basic Philosophy of the Miami University Curriculum

The "Engaged Learning University" curriculum at Miami University is based on the philosophy that students will need to be gradually introduced to the idea of "self-authorship" over the course of their undergraduate education, slowly being encouraged away from the idea that knowledge is an external absolute, and towards the process of fully engaging in the authorship of their own lifelong education (Hodge, 2009). They believe that students need to be divided into three basic tiers so that they can be introduced to the material in an appropriate way. "Tier 1" students (consisting mostly of first-year students) still view knowledge as an external absolute. "Tier 2" students (generally sophomores and juniors) will have experience co-authoring their education and will need encouragement to take a leading role in this process (such as designing upper division class projects). "Tier 3" students (generally seniors) will be encouraged to take a leading role in authoring projects beyond the campus in the greater community.

Goals of the Miami Curriculum

The goals of the curriculum are to develop students' abilities to define and integrate their belief system and to help students evaluate evidence critically, make informed judgments, and act ethically. The program also works to develop the students' ability to negotiate and act on their own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those they might have uncritically assimilated from others. In addition, the program guides the students to develop a self-authored

interpersonal structure that emphasizes standing up for one's beliefs over gaining affirmation from others.

Methods of the Curriculum

To accomplish these goals, the program offers authentic curricular and co-curricular experiences for the students that steadily increase in challenge, and also uses a holistic approach for student growth. The program also encourages students to practice continuous self-reflection and validates the students' potential as scholars. Miami University has revised policies and practices to move away from a focus on customer satisfaction, checklists, and formulas toward authentic reflection, development, and learning. The program also pushes students to gain intellectual, relational, and personal maturity through continuous feedback and high expectations. As well, the faculty works to steadily relinquish authority and empower students to assume greater agency over the discovery process and learning environment.

Specific Pieces of the Curriculum

One specific example of "Tier 1" of this curriculum is a theatre appreciation course that was modified to offer students the opportunity to witness a weekly "master class" of experts who demonstrate a fundamental principle of drama. At the other weekly meeting for the class, students assemble in small groups to write and perform their own mini-plays that illustrate the mastery of the principle introduced in the master class. An example of "Tier 2" is a program where sophomores and juniors participate in a "Scholar-Leader Living Learning Community" in which the residents and the hall director brainstorm diverse ideas and collaborate to construct their own community standards, hall outcomes, and programming. A recent "Tier 3" capstone project focused on designing, fabricating, and installing a human-powered water pump system for the village of Gwele Kona in Mali, West Africa, so that an orphanage could be built.

Possible Artifacts of the Curriculum

One possible artifact from the curriculum would be a reflection paper written during freshman orientation with the prompt: "Write about your goals for your college experience as an imaginary dialogue between yourself and a dominant figure in your life and then think about how you can fulfill what you seek in college while still maintaining a relationship with this

important person." Other artifacts could include ongoing clubs or organizations created on campus by the students and the results of off-campus projects initiated by students (such as a human-powered well project in West Africa).

Co-Curriculum and Purpose

Co-curricular activities are those that have some connection to a student's course of formal studies and wherein faculty often play a role. The most common examples are student government and campus clubs, but there are many more examples highlighted below. In their book "Putting Students First," Braskamp, Trautvetter and Ward (2006) put forth a series of arguments that students find purpose and balance between their interior (identity, morality, and spirituality) and exterior (objective and observable) lives. They state that their research finds a recurring theme in "the importance of out of class environments for helping students to make meaning of their interior lives." Faculty, staff, and places also play an important role in developing the co-curriculum for students. In particular: office hours, events at faculty homes, study abroad programs accompanied by faculty, summer research experiences with faculty, and undergraduate research involving one on one experience with a faculty member. Colleges that have successfully integrated these programs have done so with intention, i.e. making participation in them as important as registering for classes.

Conclusion

Information, personal values, and one's sense of purpose change over time. To help students lead a life of purpose the University can help students have intentional experiences to evaluate and promote their own sense of purpose. As an institution can encourage and celebrate students to paint their own path. History has shown us that formal education has changed overtime to meet the needs and political will of society. Education is a way to prepare learners for the future but if we do not create space to focus on an individual's purpose, do we prepare them for their future?

Our takeaways:

- Going to school is not just about getting a job. Finding a purpose isn't about finding 'it' - it is about the learning the continuous *process* of finding purpose. Purpose is not irrelevant to going to college.

- The 2008 recession impact on higher education has been a shift toward transactional approach to education.

- Purpose helps us as faculty and staff to relate to what students care about and to energize them in their work

- What are the artefacts? Reflection papers/writing values (set intentional values/goals in 1st year and then throughout time at SOU, revisit, like a checklist, in final year have culminating reflection looking past and forward).

- Lives of purpose can be addressed through many aspects of curriculum and co-curricular activities, but perhaps especially gen ed, capstones, and co-curricular activities that overlap with student's sense of purpose.

- Recommendation - read, discuss, apply at the department level as well. How are programs already doing this (perhaps using different language), and how can we do this better/more explicitly?

- Make language more similar across programs so students understand what purpose means, why it matters, and how they can integrate the process and critical thinking around purpose into their lives (create messaging/branding for all programs).

- Thread through assessment. Create explicit feedback mechanisms through assessment on the subject of "lives of purpose."

Questions we want to hear from the SOU Community:

- Are lives of purpose a core part of our university? Is it one of many different things? Is our mission or vision? Should it be more operationalized? Should working with students to develop lives of purpose part of our mission?

- Should this be a university-wide initiative? If so, what does that mean? Identify pieces of a student's career at SOU, map assessment processes (TracDat?)

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