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Editor's Corner: Controversy, Control and Confronting Structural Injustice

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Editor's Corner: Controversy, Control and Confronting Structural Injustice

It has been an honor to be the inaugural editor-in-chief of *College Student Affairs Leadership*. As this journal concludes its first year in publication, it is important to consider the context and climate within which budding scholars and student affairs professionals are working, and to consider how our values impact our work. At this moment in time, college students across the country are holding protests and die-ins in reaction to gendered and racialized structural violence. The deaths and trials of Michael Brown, Yvette Smith, Tamir Rice, Marissa Alexander, and Eric Garner demand a response, yet very few of us are equipped to discuss complex social issues like the structural violence that is killing and incarcerating Black people. As professional staff members, many questions are considered, such as: Should we be encouraging students to protest? Should we be present at the protests? Do we attend to ensure that the unrest stays “civil?”

In service of our career advancement, student affairs and higher education professionals want to do more research and contribute scholarship about why colleges and universities struggle to attract and retain students of color. Of course, we should desire to give space and voice to the most vulnerable of our students. However, as a budding scholar I have discovered that what is researched, published and accepted is based upon the values and politics historically rooted in the legacies of White supremacy and patriarchy. Published research often (re)creates the norm, because it is not designed to challenge the fundamental structures of power. Our profession expects us to be unbiased about issues that have been deemed controversial. However, the very things that are labeled controversial are often matters of justice.

Student affairs and higher education professionals need to be equipped to wrestle through complex social issues with students. A journal such as this one should be an avenue for critical conversations about our roles and potential roles in the context of structural injustices. Yet, what is researched and published is filtered through the hierarchy of the ivory tower and disconnected from the everyday experience of our most vulnerable students. We continue to claim that diversity is either important to us, or that it is an inevitable future. However, the presence of difference within the student body without changing our structures

does little to nothing to address the racism, classism, ableism, and cis-heterosexism that are pervasive at our institutions.

As budding scholars and higher education professionals, the work should begin internally. As student affairs and higher education professionals, we need to begin the work of unlearning—unlearning that systemic, structural violence is acceptable and other lessons a White supremacist capitalist society has taught us. We need to be awakened to the systemic violence happening around us both inside and outside of the intuitions that employ us. Instead of wondering how to control student protests, we should be proud if we teach our students to demand an end to systemic violence. How best can we teach them? By joining alongside them and working to dismantle structural violence together. In relationship, we have power to take action.

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