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497A
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Interview

Chris Brida and Shaun O'Malley interviewed Diane Andrews, Senior Director of Residence Life at Penn State University. Diane has had a formidable career, working in Admissions, Student Activities, Recreational Sports and Residence Life. Andrews has worked as an employee at the Pennsylvania State University for 26 years and for the past 10 years, has been serving as the Director of Residence Life. She received her Bachelor's of Science degree in Rehabilitation Services and Psychology from the University of Maine in Farmington and a Master's degree in Higher Education Student Affairs Administration from Indiana University-Bloomington.

Higher education, more importantly, Residence Life is an ever-changing landscape and as student's needs change, residential life and student affairs practitioners need to be able to adapt to constantly meet the needs of the students. In today's world Andrews felt that, "attending college to obtain a 4 year degree has become a mainstream activity with many people attending college who would not have normally attended college." With these changes, though, come a myriad of challenges and opportunities, but the advice that Andrews gave was "to always focus on the big picture."

A lot of times, new professionals focus only on their job or on their piece of the pie without stopping to look at the entire picture and all of the decisions and consequences that come into play. Policy and procedures are put into place that may or may not be beneficial to a particular department, but what is important is that people have to remember why the policy is in place or to investigate and understand how that policy relates to the bigger picture. Andrews said that an important question to always ask is, "How many people are impacted by the decision?"

Andrews felt that in Residence Life, it is important that a successful candidate for employment have some sort of experience in Residence Life. Andrews felt that most institutions want a Master's degree in Higher Education or Student Affairs, but Andrews said the most important factors do not rely in the type of degree, as much as the "transferrable skills," that can come from the degree or their previous job experience. Andrews said that the most important advice that she can give and the most important skill that contributed to her success was to, simply put, "Do your day job." Andrews said that a lot of new professionals can easily get wrapped up in networking and professional organizations such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) or the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I), but "Most new professionals are always looking for and thinking about how to move up in the field" and in doing so they forget to focus on the present job at hand. Responding quickly, being attentive, paying attention to details and focusing on your staff are important. The other important thing is to look at everything as a teachable moment. Even if you have a diversified experience, never stop learning. Andrews said that every job she has ever had has contributed to lifelong learning and development that has helped her get to where she is today.

She stressed how important it is that you love your job. As a practitioner, we are oftentimes "generalists", in that we get to have the opportunity to diversify our experiences by trying different departments such as student activities, student conduct, multicultural resources and athletics. In Residence Life, it is never the same because every day brings about a new challenge with a new opportunity to resolve problems. For Andrews, no matter what she did she found herself always

being drawn to the ever evolving atmosphere of Residence Life and that's when she knew it was her calling.

With change comes opportunity and these opportunities can oftentimes be disguised as challenges. Over the past 5-6 years it is a trend that most students, regardless of how well they perform academically, they are still in need of more guidance, more resources, and more involvement from professionals to help them be successful. Andrews' theory is that since Higher Education has become more mainstream, many people that normally would not have gone to college are now going to college sparking an influx of students who may not have the skill set to cope with living in a community, sharing, and mediating conflict. Andrews said that another new challenge, which really started after the tragedy at Virginia Tech is this focus on Behavioral Threat Management. Andrews said that schools are having to think more about their procedures and threat management to ensure the safety and security of every student. With that, the thought of student affairs being a 24/7 job is not necessarily a new concept but, is becoming ever more a reality, especially with the changing of mandates and new reporting policies regarding Title IX, the Clery Act and the Affordable Care Act.

With the economy the way it is and with the emergence of new technology such as the World Campus, Penn State will have to reinvent itself if it is going to be successful. People will always want their children to come to college and have a traditional college experience which includes a residential setting, however Andrews felt that with the emergence of online classes that can be taken from anywhere in the world, residential campuses are going to have to see a change. Penn State currently has University Park and 9 other residential campuses with the hope of expanding a residential focus to Brandywine and Abington in the near future. Though expanding residential facilities to other campus also brings about many economic challenges and the question needs to be asked, "Should Penn State be looking to expand?", Andrews believes that the small campuses are the ones that are going to be the ones that experience the biggest economic pitfalls and can Penn State continue to be as large as it is.

Comparatively speaking, Andrews felt that PSU is different from its Big 10 counterparts. She said that PSU has the 2nd highest public tuition in the country with Michigan being the closest to Penn State. Her feeling is that one of the most unique features of Penn State is really this notion of one campus, geographically dispersed. Andrews said that even though every campus is uniquely different, the connection that each campus has with each other to engage student learning is unlike any other university's connection or commitment to creating a unified institution.

Andrews felt that creating a strong co-curriculum is extremely important to the total development of the student. Getting students to make connections between their academic experience and the real-world living and working component that happens in a residential learning environment is paramount. Because of this, Andrews felt that Residence Life is a viable field with lots of opportunities for growth and development.

Note on Protocol: Both Brida and O'Malley created questions and scheduled a meeting with Senior Director Andrews. During the interview, Brida and O'Malley took turns asking questions. The process, though informal, was a professional conversation utilizing active listening skills and thoughtful questions to engage Andrews in a conversation about Residence Life, emerging trends, challenges, opportunities and career pathways.

- **Interview Questions asked:**
What is the most helpful degree and why?

- What was the best career advice you ever received?
- What was the biggest stepping stone for you in your career?
- What is the biggest challenges you face in your role?
- What made you want to get into this line of work and why?
- How is your job different at PSU than other state universities? What are the special challenges and benefits associated with this job?
- Do you believe your job is a passion for you and if so what made it your passion?
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- What are some interesting or current trends in the field?
What are some emerging challenges or previous challenges to the field?
What threats exist with external housing options? Do you think that the residential model for colleges and universities can continue to remain affordable, convenient and sustainable?
Co-Curriculum is important. How do you feel that Co-Curriculum can enhance college students lives?