Our Stories – with Dr. Don Albrecht

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*Dr. Don Albrecht is the Vice President for Student Engagement and Success at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. He became a member of TACUSPA in 1978 and served as President in 1989-90 and TACUSPA foundation chair in 2011-12.*

How did you begin your Career in Student Affairs/Higher Education?

My undergrad experience at Texas A&M University provided me the opportunity to get to know many campus administrators, especially those in Student Affairs. I was the student director of the Fish Camp orientation program, and through that role and others, met John Koldus, Carolyn Adair, and many others. I asked "how can I work in a job like yours?" of Carolyn Adair and others, and things started falling into place. I was accepted into the higher ed program at A&M, became a graduate assistant for Carolyn Adair in Student Activities, and eventually became the associate director.

What is the one thing you would want to tell an aspiring Student Affairs/Higher Education Practitioner?

I received some very good advice when I was an aspiring practitioner. Going into this field should be done with a dedication that is more than simply love of alma mater. Obviously, I was able to get my start in the profession where I received my undergraduate degree, but I recalled that advice when opportunities for growth and advancement were presented at other campuses. I encourage all those considering this field to enter it if they can see themselves serving students at any college or university. If allowed a second piece of advice, I would tell aspiring practitioners to hone their listening skills. That may be the most important skill required for our work for and with students.

What do you feel you have contributed the most to in the field of Student Affairs/Higher Education?

I have been very fortunate to have worked at four wonderful, but very different universities, and I have worked with outstanding colleagues and students. I learned a great deal from them, and I hope I was able to help them in some way. I was encouraged to be involved and accept leadership roles in our professional organizations and I have done that with my staff. I also hope I demonstrate a good balance between student advocacy and administrative priorities as well as a healthy work-life balance.
What do you feel is the biggest challenge for a Student Affairs/Higher Education Practitioner today?

I feel the expectations and requirements for practitioners have grown exponentially since the time I started in the field. While not arguing their merits, we spend exceptionally more time and resources on reporting, compliance, assessment, and many other relatively new initiatives. And then, as with all of higher education administration, requests for additional staff to accomplish these tasks are rarely granted. Too often, we just add this on to all the other things we need to do.

Please tell us of your journey in TACUSPA and the value it brings a practitioner in the field of Student Affairs/Higher Education.

Because my first supervisor, Carolyn Adair, was heavily involved in TACUSPA, I was introduced to TACUSPA as a first year professional. My first role was as a committee chair, and in true TACUSPA style, one role prepared me for another, and another, and eventually I became President. I recently completed six years on the TACUSPA Foundation Board. TACUSPA has been my professional home for over 35 years and has provided me with great friends and colleagues, and the best professional development opportunities any student affairs organization could offer. TACUSPA offers a national quality organization right here in the State and particularly serves generalists very well. It remains current and proactive; it offers networking and best practices; and it continues to grow and meet the needs of our profession.