Notes from the Keynote: Kevin Kruger

Dr. Kevin Kruger became the first president and CEO of NASPA in March 2012. He serves as a national advocate for students and as a spokesperson for the student affair profession, drawing on more than 30 years of experience in higher education.

What excites you about working in student affairs?

Student Affairs is a noble profession: tens of thousands of student affairs professionals working to ensure the success of millions of college students. It is important work that we do – so I am honored to be a part of this work. As most student affairs professionals would attest – there is nothing more meaningful than knowing you have helped a single student.

What does your role at NASPA entail?

As president/CEO of NASPA, I really have two separate but related jobs. The first is to help guide the association in partnership with the NASPA Board of Directors, our hundreds of volunteers and the NASPA staff. This role involves strategic leadership. Helping align staff, resources and programs to our overall strategic objectives. The second part of my job is a little less defined. It involves representing the entire student affairs profession and reinforcing the value of our contributions to audiences for whom that may not be an obvious conclusion. So, I spend a lot of my time talking to media, college presidents, provosts, and other higher education associations that work in the higher education arena.

What are your ideas for more collaboration between TACUSPA and NASPA?

Texas is a huge state representing many different types of institutions. There are certainly more opportunities to partner and collaborate on programs that would meet the needs of student affairs professionals in Texas. NASPA also has the advantage of having a very elaborate infrastructure. Since TACUSPA operates largely by volunteers, who already have full-time jobs, there could be partnership ideas that leverage NASPA’s administrative and back-end expertise.

There are moments in each of our lives and/or careers that led us to the point we are today. What was that moment for you?

It was my interview in 1994 for the Associate Executive Director of NASPA. It was that interview that tapped into my interest in working on national-level issues that affected all of

Student Affairs On Campus
The Journal for the Texas Association of College & University Student Personnel Administrators (TACUSPA)
higher education. That was a big change from my earlier thinking that was only campus-based.

You have written books and lecture frequently on using technology in student affairs. What are three things every student affairs professional should be doing from a technology perspective?

First thing is the easiest. You have to use the technology your students use. You have to be where they are and understand the potential for community building and engagement using the same tools used by your students. The second and related point is that the college experience is becoming increasingly less place-based. As such, we will need to think over the next five years or so about how to pivot traditional student affairs to meet the growing needs of online learners. These online learners will have some of the same socio-emotional needs as our residential students. How can we use technology to serve them? We might want to be thinking of “flipped” student affairs in the same way we think about “flipped” classrooms.

How would you briefly say the student affairs profession has changed in the past 20 years?

We face huge changes in regulatory and compliance requirements. We are much more central to the crisis management part of the campus. Finally, as our student bodies have become more diverse, issues of equity and inclusion have become more central to the work of the entire profession.

What do you think is the most pressing issue facing student affairs/higher education today?

We have to begin making progress in reducing sexual assault on campus and drastically improving the work we are doing with students to change the culture. This is huge and needs to be addressed more effectively TODAY. I also think a more subtle issue is increasing the way in which we orient our services to meet the needs of low-income/first generation students. I believe in ten years we will be judged on how well we have been able to help guide these students to graduation and meaningful careers.

What is the one thing that you hope TACUSPA conference attendees will take away from your keynote address?

We are in an unprecedented time in higher education. There are so many challenges we face that desperately need the expertise of student affairs professionals. But do not despair. Yes, we are challenged, but the history of student affairs has been an adaptation. I am very bullish on our future and our central importance in addressing these challenging issues – I want the TACUSPA audience to feel the same, while recognizing the many challenges we face.