

# Relationships With College And University Administrators

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I am the administrator at Ball State University with primary responsibility for its relationships with student religious organizations and campus ministers. Ball State established such an office because of a conviction that religious development is an inescapable part of a student's education. Yet, it also recognized that constitutionally all of the resources needed for such development are the responsibility of religious institutions. My office was established, therefore, with the secular purpose to integrate, into the educational opportunities available at Ball State, the resources needed "to assist students in their search for meaning and values and for understanding their own faith and the faiths of others." This provision is based on a recognition that students retain all their First Amendment rights. They may organize for religious purposes the same as for any other legitimate cause. Such "benevolent neutrality" has resulted in Ball State being served by 35 student religious organizations with more than twenty full-time advisors — ministerial and lay of all varieties.

I have been in this position for 22 years and it continues to be challenging because no two days are alike. After eleven years earlier as a Baptist campus minister, I had two strong convictions about campus ministry-university relationships: (1) The kind of relationships campus ministries have with their institutions has a lot to do with the ease with which they do ministry if not the ultimate success of their ministry; (2) The nature of the relationship depends more on the university than the campus ministries. Campus ministries, unless paid for by the university as at some private and church related institutions, are always guests on campus. Therefore, campus ministers are in a responsive rather than authoritative position; but, they can be quite influential in effecting a good working relationship.

I accepted the position at Ball State in part to develop such a relationship between the university and its campus ministries.

I feel a great deal of satisfaction, therefore, when one of them, usually after a meeting with other campus ministers of their kind, comes back to campus with the word, "Ball State is the best place to work; we have less hassle than any in getting our work done." I believe Ball State students benefit as well. I know Ball State's image is helped when confrontation with ministers is unnecessary.

### **Why should a campus minister be concerned about relationships with university administrators?**

Authority is a key word for finding Biblical direction for relating to university administrators. Administrators do wield authority which ultimately derives from the state for public institutions by legislative enactment or, in the case of private institutions, by the state granting charters. The Biblical injunctions for relating to authority (Romans 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-14, Mark 12:17, Acts 8:29) hold for university administrators the same as for any other. We are to respect, to pray for, to cooperate with, and to challenge when some moral principle is at stake. The university administrator represents Caesar and the campus ministers must never forget this. Cooption for university ends is always a subtle possibility.

Authority in the university like anywhere else is necessary. Administrators provide order, facilitate good conduct and generally create an environment for optimal educational relationships. But the administrator is limited in the spiritual and moral realm. For pragmatic reasons, the campus ministry and university administrators need each other in order to accomplish their shared goal — a total education for whole persons.

Not only does the campus minister have pragmatic reasons for a cooperative relationship with university administrators, but also the Scriptures admonish God's followers for other reasons to respect authority — the desire for a good conscience, love for all God's creatures, as well as fear of punishment. The administrator can throw you off campus!

### **How do you find that administrator who has the authority for relationships with campus ministry?**

In a few institutions this may be clear; however, in many

this is not so. You may find the actual authority diffused among several administrators. Sometimes when lines of authority are not well defined, powerful individuals may have usurped and asserted the authority more or less on their own. Such situations may exist unknown to many even within the institution. Often, because of deep personal interest, such persons can be most helpful, but they can also be quite biased on behalf of their own kind of religion.

Generally, the authority for religious life belongs to someone in student affairs, often an activities director or one of the generalists in the dean's office. A few years ago (1972), The Association for the Coordination of University Religious Affairs, the national organization for college administrators in religious life, in a survey of the four-year public institutions, found that two-thirds do officially name a specific person for this function. Two-thirds of those so named were in student affairs offices.

This finding is not surprising because, historically in American higher education, student affairs staff have been the ones expected to attend to human values and moral behavior. About 100 years ago, when the focus of academic areas narrowed to rationality and knowledge, the legacy of education of the total person was delegated to deans of students. In fact, Frederick Rudolph has called them the "high priests" of higher education. The chief student personnel officer, therefore, is the administrator most likely to have interest in or responsibility for relating to religious life.

**How do universities go about effecting a formal relationship with something many believe should be constitutionally separate?**

Frequently, the institution already has a well defined pattern for recognizing or relating to religious concerns. Sometimes this is a formal policy, but often it is informal. The safest grounds for a public institution for doing this is to recognize the rights of students to exercise freely their faith. This includes organizing for religious purposes and being served by campus ministers. At Ball State, we grant a secondary recognition to any advisor which the student organizations name. In this way the university does not have to make determinations about the adequacy of theological preparation or ordination or other credentials. We have stated these in 12 working principles:



1. A part of the constitutional right of each student is access to the resources necessary for the practice of his/her particular faith.

2. The various religious bodies, rather than the university, are responsible for providing these resources.

3. The university works impartially with all religious groups as they seek to provide these resources.

4. The religious groups, rather than the university, determine whether they will work separately, cooperatively, or unitedly with each other.

5. No person or group is required to participate in some program or organizational arrangement which causes him to feel that he is violating a principle of his faith.

6. The university's only basis for accepting or rejecting resources offered by religious groups is on grounds of compatibility with the educational goals and orderly processes of the university.

7. Students have as much right to organize for religious purposes as for any other purpose.

8. Student religious groups should be accorded the same rights and privileges and be held accountable in the same way as student groups organized for other purposes.

9. Membership requirements for student religious organizations should be consistent with the stated purposes of the group.

10. Ministers or lay leaders officially designated by religious bodies to work with university recognized student religious groups should be granted every right of access to the university possible in their work with students, faculty, and university staff.

11. The only restrictions which the university should place on these ministers are those dictated by fair play for each other and by consideration for the orderly processes of the university.

12. Curricular or co-curricular programs officially sponsored by the university should be conducted because of their educational value rather than because they promote a particular sect or religion.

Some universities, even public ones, choose to recognize campus ministers as such. Check to see what qualifications the institution may have, written and unwritten. Sometimes these can be quite restrictive.

In addition to recognizing campus ministers as student organization adjunct advisors, some schools provide recognition on the basis of their counseling functions or their willingness to join a ministerial association or chaplain's team. Others, especially in the Southwest, grant recognition on academic grounds as professors of religion.

Fortunately, help is available. The Council on Standards, a coalition of most of the national professional student personnel associations, has just issued recommended guidelines for all areas of student personnel work. It is hoped that colleges will use these in developing their own policies and practices as well as preparation for their periodic visitation of accrediting associations. One section deals with Religious Programs, which people in the Association for the Coordination of University Religious Affairs helped to write. The president and chief student personnel officer at your college should already have a copy, compliments of one of the national student personnel associations.

### **What relationships can be negotiated?**

Relationships with university administrators, like any other relationships, are reciprocal. They carry both privileges and obligations, as well as rights and responsibilities. Privileges which universities, even public ones, are willing to grant (because no significant costs are involved) are the right for student religious organizations (1) to use campus space for meetings, (2) to have access to institutional communication channels, and (3) to be listed in telephone directories. Sometimes office space is available, especially in community colleges, at a fee. This may include use of university telephones, duplicating services and equipment such as audio-visual aids. Frequently, access to recreational facilities and discounts at university stores are included. Ministers may be free to visit in residence halls and health centers and to receive referrals about students from various offices, including religious preference information on students and faculty.

Responsibilities are usually more general: to abide by the

institution's rules and regulations and to cooperate in joint programming. The latter expectation is more frequent at private institutions — as at Vanderbilt, where production of at least one cooperative program per year is the condition for official recognition as a part of the Office of University Ministry.

My point is that even within a state system the nature of administrative/campus ministry relationships varies a great deal from campus to campus. The history, the context and the personal trust built up over the years are all factors.

**When you want improved relationships, how should you go about it?**

First, work with other campus ministers. Universities like to be fair and this means treating all religious groups — whether denominational, ecumenical or para-church, Christian or other religion — alike. The privileges they grant to one, they need to be able to give to all. They want all to be willing to play by the same rules. So, it helps to approach university administration as a united front, as a ministerial association.

Secondly, work through channels, follow existing regulations even when asking for changes. State your case in educational terms (what contributes to the total development of all students) rather than a benefit for religion; then you are more likely to be heard and responded to positively. Negative reactions are more likely when campus ministers seem more interested in privileges for themselves than responsibility for others.

Third, familiarize yourself with useable resources. Peruse official university documents for statements which indicate a concern for the religious life of students. I have already referred to the standards statement on Religious Programs now being recommended to colleges and universities by national higher education associations. Couch your requests in terms you find in these documents. Resources also include key people. A person from within an institution can sometimes speak with more force than someone from "across the street." Locate key Baptists and other Christians on the faculty, staff or college board.

Fourth, cooperate with college programming. Much that the university already sponsors is in line with the concerns of campus ministers. Make yourself available for panels, discussion groups and consultation for classes, residence halls and



other student organizations. Any veteran campus minister can provide a long list of these opportunities from his/her experience. If you are perceived as a team player, you are much more likely to be heard.

Fifth, use networks of common interest which already exist rather than going it alone. Allies abound for almost any cause, but they will not be the same for all causes. Faculty and administrators will help when the matter concerns them also. But again, don't expect or request special favors or privileges.

Sixth, get agreements in writing and, whenever possible, ask for approval as policy by an authority as far up the power-ladder as practical. A memo from a dean is good, but a letter by the president is better. A resolution approved by the Board is best of all. Since university administration is hierarchial, the support and recommendation of the administrator at each rank is important if not essential.

Good relationships with university administrators are not only satisfying but also may be "absolutely essential." This was what the American Baptist campus minister at Ball State, last year's president of our Council of Religious Advisors, said when I asked him what I should say to you. Since relationships are always changing, initiative by you as a campus minister can make things better for you and for the students whom we pray grow as Christ did "in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).