



Two Thousand Hours

Advice for a New Student Affairs Professional

By Sinclair P. Ceasar III
Foreword by Dr. Ann Marie Klotz
Edited by Victoria Rowlands

**If you're
reading this,
it's because
of them.**

We want to thank the contributors for taking time to provide thoughtful, practical, and helpful advice. This book would have not been possible without you. Seriously, it would just be a cover page.

Foreword

A wise mentor once called me at 6:30 a.m. on the first day of my new job. “You get one chance,” she told me, “to show them every reason why they made a brilliant decision to pick you. Let today be the day they congratulate themselves on making a great hire.”

I pass on that advice as food for thought as you begin your first professional position. This is the time where you start building your professional legacy, reputation, and network which should be built carefully and thoughtfully. This is a time to work hard. Really freaking hard.

Your first two thousand hours turns into five years before you know it. During the first five years, you are building a foundation by which all career success will grow from. Today is the day you become a difference-maker in the lives of students. It is both a tremendous honor and an awesome responsibility. Take all of the tools you have acquired throughout your academic career and bring your very best self to work every day—your students are counting on you!

Wishing you much success,
Dr. Ann Marie Klotz
Dean of Campus Life
New York Institute of Technology

The Intro

I wanted to leave. I'd spent my first two years of undergrad at Saint Peter's University as the overly involved student, but I was not fulfilled. I told Melody Wiggins, Assistant Director of Student Activities at the time, that I was going to transfer to a bigger institution.

*Melody challenged my course of action. She encouraged me to think about what I could change and improve at Saint Peter's to make it the institution I wanted to attend. I was frustrated. She wasn't telling me what I wanted to hear. **I'm glad she didn't.** Weeks passed and after much discernment I realized that I needed to make major changes. I wasn't alone in these efforts. Melody and other Student Affairs professionals were there to help guide me as I figured out my last two years of school.*

That's just a small glimpse into my Student Affairs story, but a huge part of why I'm committed to our field. I want to do what Melody and so many others did. Which brings us to this book. My hope is that at least one new professional gains insight to help them succeed during their first three months (2,000 hours) at their new institution. I've found the advice in this book to be valuable, insightful, and real. None of it will prove to be useful, however, if you don't make it work for you. But, I'm betting you'll make it work in addition to the great things you already do. Thank you for being you.

*With Gratitude,
Sinclair Preston Ceasar III
August 2015*

**When you
get lost on
your way to
the dining
hall.**

Learn as much about your campus culture as you possibly can and find out how that impacts your position.

Alexandria Harris
Social Justice Fellows Program Coordinator
Spelman College¹

¹ Every job title and institution name was accurate at the time of publishing, and may have changed since then.

Remember that the conflicts of others do not have to be your burden. Don't take sides in office politics: draw your own conclusions.

Krystal Miguel
Degree Attainment for Returning +
Transfer Scholars Program Coordinator
University of California, Merced

My piece of advice is three parts:

- 1. Navigate the political landscape, and learn who the movers and shakers are – These people influence a lot about the institution and the way things are done, so be sure to identify allies and those whom you are able to trust so that you can learn how to navigate the ever-changing political landscape of your new institution.*
- 2. Make sure you start off with good habits – find time to go to the gym or local places to take exercise classes – your work-life balance and well-being are extremely important to your success as a new professional. Make sure to talk about your needs with your supervisor to ensure that you communicate expectations for engaging in work-life balance.*
- 3. Be yourself. You were hired because of who you are and the skill set, knowledge and experience that you bring to your new institution. Ask questions, get involved and continue to be you. Model this to students, it will take you and them far!*

Max Quinn
Resident Director
Bridgewater State University

Observation is your best friend. Sit back and observe the cultural climate of your new institution. Become one with the school and its culture: find your allies that you can trust, find the ones to stay away from, find your safe space. It's important to observe as much about climate and campus operations as possible.

Find your current institution's 'way' and let go of "when I was at XYZ College, we did things this way".

Geovani Ayala,
Way2GoMaryland Program Coordinator
University System of Maryland

First, the culture of an institution isn't something you learn in a day. At the same time, the culture will impact what you are able to do more than anything else. Devote yourself to learning it and your life will be easier.

Second, experience trumps education, but education can help you learn from experience faster. In other words, someone with a diploma who's been at the institution for 30 years is a treasure trove of knowledge. You have a different perspective than them, and that's important, but six or seven years of post-secondary isn't going to make up for 20-30 years of experience. Look at it again when you have seven years of post-secondary and five to ten years of experience and it might be different.

Third and most important, never make a decision about a group without their input. You can call it paternalistic, privilege or anything else but at its core it shows a lack of respect. The phrase "nothing about us without us" should be paramount in your considerations.

Noah Arney
Associate Registrar
Native Education College

Take time to participate in and understand the traditions of a campus, even when they may not directly align with your individual job responsibilities or functional area. This is helpful for several reasons:

- 1. You are able to get a pulse on campus climate, culture, and priorities.*
- 2. You are gaining an opportunity to understand the student experience.*
- 3. You will have the opportunity to network with other professionals and students through these events - this also helps build some social capital for you in your role.*
- 4. If you have been brought in to make change, you will have done your research. You will be able to make your own evaluations instead of blindly making changes.*
- 5. You will have fun engaging in and learning more about your new professional home!*

Participate early and often - you will be a better professional for it. When there isn't a tradition for you to observe or participate in, be sure to keep up with your campus newspaper, as it also helps to make meaning of campus climate, culture, experiences, and priorities.

Derek C. Bundy
Student Involvement Advisor
The University of Chicago

Find out the campus culture and traditions before you try to start making change. You need to understand your environment to best be a part of it and truly make a difference. Understand there are politics at every level and learn how to navigate those. Do not constantly use your previous institution as comparison, especially by name. It will make it appear as though you aren't happy where you are and that your old institution was better. Embrace and accept your new environment, even if everything isn't perfect.

Gennie Lynn
Coordinator of Residence Life
Texas A&M University

Be comfortable with not knowing, it's your time to learn and absorb! Take time to get to know the politics and be cautious about sharing your opinions with others until you see the full picture. Take time to figure out who has influence whether or not their title reflects it! Listen and observe others, but also try to make up your own mind about the work environment and create your own unique experience.

Inna Link
Student Success Coordinator
Vanguard University

*Talk to your supervisor about the most common form of communication in the office. I went from an office where you poked your head in the door to ask questions if you were near someone's office to an office where email was **HIGHLY** preferred (a.k.a., by poking my head in, I was interrupting a line of thought or a project).*

Jennica Botonis
Admissions Counselor
Texas Lutheran University

**When you
have no
problem
sharing
your
thoughts.**

Don't have any preconceptions about any of the offices or any of the people on campus. Don't let other people tell you what to think about any one person or office on campus. Come to your own conclusions.

Barry Titler
Director of Public Safety
Mount St. Mary's University

My advice to a new professional would be to do a lot of listening to understand culture and context in your first few months, but also stay true to yourself. You were hired for a reason, don't lose sight of that!

Victoria Farris
Dean of Residence Life
Saint Peter's University

Listen more. Yes you have the fresh skills and have recently learned all the latest approaches for working with students, but truly take the time to learn about the culture and community at your first professional position/institution.

Find an ally at your institution that can assist you with your transition and who has the experiential wisdom you lack.

Deborah Scheibler
Assistant Director of Housing and Residence Life
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Camden

From someone who's been an SA pro full-time since January 2002: Listen more than you speak for the first 3 months. You'll be amazed what you learn. Speaking of learning: you'll learn more in those 3 months than you EVER did in grad school....welcome to the real deal.

One last piece of advice: keep a journal of your achievements. You'll need those for a pick-me-up.

Sara Craft Croncini
Assistant Director, Career Services
NC State University

During your first 3 months (and really, your first 12 months) on any new job, LOOK, LISTEN, and LEARN. LOOK around you, get to know names of buildings, streets, people, and titles. Be able to give someone directions to somewhere on campus. LISTEN to what people say and don't say. LEARN as much as you can about the institution, student culture, campus politics, and budgetary issues.

Don't try to change things until you fully understand the history behind why things are done the way they are on that campus.

Joanne Goldwater
Associate Dean of Students/Director of Residence Life
Co-Founder/Co-Director of RELI
St. Mary's College of Maryland

Say "yes" often and volunteer for as many opportunities outside of your specific department as you can balance with your role. This is not to suggest that you should be a push-over and/or over commit yourself. Many of your most important lessons will come from involving yourself in other areas of the academy. (But remember to keep this in balance with your position's responsibilities, which should always be your first priority.)

Believe in the power of "nice." Do not bow to unnecessary politics or drama. Committing to be a constant positive presence on campus will pay off just as much as your hard work.

Watch and listen for the constant stream of lessons about to come your way during your first year.

Mike Taberski
Dean of Students
New England College

**When your
mentor has
told you to
network for
the tenth
time.**

Get to know people outside of your direct office. Understanding others' roles will help you to identify mutually beneficial collaboration opportunities. Plus, being well-connected is a great way to better understand the institutional culture and to brand yourself as a leader.

Laura Arthur
Associate Director of Coaching & Education +
Career Development Office
Johns Hopkins Carey Business School

Meet as many people as you can - from every level at the institution. Establish yourself as a go-getter and learn as much as you can about the institutional culture and politics, so that you can be informed when making suggestions/comments in meetings, etc.

Rebecca McQueen
Director of the Sophomore Experience
Kentucky Wesleyan College

"Forgive, but never forget." The field is too small and too connected to hold grudges or waste your time on power plays between your colleagues. You may not agree with or get along with everyone, but we are all in the field to make a difference in the lives of students. That is the constant. So, when you feel slighted or that someone is not fighting in your corner, take the time to come to terms with that, however difficult that may be. Forgive them, move on, but never forget. It is important to remember who your closest friends and supporters are in the field and who may be fighting you for the same resources or trying to undercut your work.

Remembering this will help you prepare yourself to be even better. You will find yourself cornered in the sandbox if you try to avoid everyone who wants your shovel. So be the best professional you can be and be the best representation of yourself to others. You are a professional now and your work is no longer about you, it is about your students. So let it go and do what you do best, being an advocate and a mentor for your students.

Jacob Sherry
Area Coordinator
SUNY Geneseo

Network, Network, Network!! Build relationships all over campus. Become friends with people in the Bursar's office, Registrar's office, Financial Aid, Mailroom, Maintenance etc..... These are the people who will help you when you're in a jam. Instead of sending a student worker to deliver forms or send things interoffice, go and introduce yourself to people.

Go to as many staff and faculty parties and get together as you can. You never know when you'll need their help, references, or letters of recommendation.

Erika Jackson
Graduate Student Advisor
NYU Steinhardt

My advice would be, to network as much as you can - both inside and outside of your new institution. I don't just mean "network" as the professional buzzword that we throw around, but set out to get to know as many folks as you can. Learn about what professionals in other offices at your institution are doing, because you never know if you can collaborate with them on future initiatives.

Connect with professionals at other institutions, whether they serve in your same functional area or they work in a completely different realm of student affairs. Doing this can only serve you well as a professional!

Kimberly White
Internship Coordinator
Birmingham-Southern College

My advice: treat every interaction as if it could lead you to a new opportunity, be it a job, research project, blog post, conference presentation, etc.

Sara Ackerson
Academic Coordinator
Washington State University

Start a running spreadsheet containing the contact information of all of the faculty and staff you meet along the way.

Michael Rideout, M.Ed
Academic Advisor & School Certifying Official
Middlesex Community College

Talk to everyone, in every department and make connections. Most importantly: do work. People will only work with you, vouch for you, and have confidence in your ability if your work ethic is intact. Every chance you get for your first three months to a year, work on something even if it's new and innovative.

Rahjuan Gordon,
Community Director
Saint Peter's University

I cannot stress enough how important is to learn, listen, and ask A LOT of questions. You never know enough in that first year. Meet with as many offices and people as you can. If you have a lot of contact with student organizations and student leaders, get to know them and hear them out as much as you would with a fellow staff member. You need that student buy-in otherwise it will be a miserable experience!

Erin Christensen
Employer Relations Coordinator
University of Missouri-Kansas City

**When
you're
feeling like
the newbie
– the only
newbie for
miles.**

Take time for self-care. It's easy to get caught up in the new opportunities. Be sure to build a foundation of work-life blend and take time for yourself while learning your new role.

Victoria “Tory” Rowlands
Area Director
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark

My words of advice: Understand that you are new to your role for the entire year. There are always new processes to learn as the needs and demands of the year flow, so don't be upset when it's March in your first academic year and you still feel like you have no idea what going on with something, it's the first time you've done it!

Sarah Haught
Coordinator for Housing and Residence Life
Western Kentucky University

No one expects you to come into a new position already knowing everything. That is why there are training sessions and supervisors. Take your time and enjoy being new and learning your institution. Your first year will pass by more quickly than you realize.

Christina Duncan
Residence Hall Assistant Director
New York University

It has been 20 years since I started my first professional position as an Area Coordinator. What is remembered is how hard it is to separate yourself from the students and staff with whom you are working. You are so close in age and yet, have such great responsibility. Remember to trust your judgement. You have good training and have earned the confidence of your boss, since you were hired.

Kim Timko Johnson
Director of Development
Mount St. Mary's University

Starting a new position can be stressful for new professionals. You may be in a new city, far away from home or feeling a bit anxious because you want to prove you can do a good job. My first piece of advice for new professionals is to spend a lot of time listening and learning. Take advantage of the fact that you are a new staff member. Set up meetings with each of your colleagues in your department to learn more about their student affairs experience and their specific job responsibilities.

As a new professional you have a pass to ask lots of questions without recourse. This is your time to build positive working relationships with your colleagues, learn more about the culture within your department, and gain valuable knowledge about the student affairs profession.

Nikkole D. Davis, Ed.D.
Counselor
Mitchell Community College

You have 365 first days. Take this time to ask questions, be unapologetically new to your position and institution, and build relationships that will help you implement change in the years to come.

Theresa Marie Brostowitz
Community Director
Bucknell University

My advice for any New Professional for their first three months working at an institution would be give yourself a break. It is going to be hard and you are going to question yourself, I know I did. I questioned whether or not I chose the right institution, the area, even the right field. Was Student Affairs even for me?! My advice is give things a chance, the fit may never be as perfect as you think but it is what you make of your experiences that makes a difference.

Step out of your comfort zone and take some risks, you never know where you will find that place where you belong. This may not happen in the first three months or the first year but still give it time or else you will miss out on some great opportunities to grow as an individual because you were too busy asking yourself too many questions. Enjoy the ride, ask others questions, learn from their experiences as new professionals and enjoy the experience because before you know it you aren't new anymore and being a new professional can be a really exciting time if you let it, so don't let it pass you by.

Samantha Townsend
Area Coordinator
Brandeis University

Reflect! You need to be able to understand your role within your department, division, and institution. Understanding where you sit is vital to taking the reins on your professional development and crafting your own approaches to well-being. With that understanding you can better advocate for what you need to be successful in your role and find ways to develop skillsets that you need. You will also be able to view how your work is impacting the students within your sphere of influence which can be crucial to motivation. Taking control of your own well-being can be another result of reflection. Think about what causes you the most stress or anxiety in your position. How do you recover from that? How do you make time for yourself in that recovery?

I can't recommend reflection enough for creating a successful first year in student affairs. Talk about it with your colleagues and supervisors. Infuse it into your work with students. Use it to learn from your everyday work because if you do then every day can be a lesson in your professional development.

Aaron Hood
Resident Director
George Mason University

My advice for a New Student Affairs Professional is establish a support system both on and off campus, because is important and necessary to help you in your transition. Whether it is a family member, close friend, or a previous employer, find at least one person to keep connected. Take time to build the relationships with your support system by calling them once a week, sending Facebook messages, having monthly meals, or writing them a letter. This will help you stay connected with people who know you while others are trying to get to know you, and it will help you stay grounded during successes and learning lessons in your career.

Also, maintain or start hobbies so that you do not get burnt out later in your career in this field. Whether working in Student Affairs is your passion or just your job, make sure to allow yourself to learn more about your desires, aspirations, and your passions and make them a priority.

Jinai Imari Gordon
Residence Hall Director & Student Activities Coordinator
Lyndon State College

You have to give respect to get respect.

Dr. Jon A. Conlogue
Executive Director
Residential Services and Campus Life
Westfield State University

**When
you're really
really really
confused.**

Ask questions and make connections! When I first started mid-year at my institution there was no transition guide or instruction manual, I was thrown right into the chaos of spring semester and had no choice but to hit the ground running (or stumbling - as long as I kept moving forward in the right direction!). My first one on one with my supervisor I expressed my self-doubt and worry. He said the best thing I can do is to acknowledge and accept that I don't know everything, but make every effort to find the answers I needed. Not only would this (and did this!) help me learn more about my job, my new institution, and the culture, but it also made me step outside of my own insecurities and really get to know the people with whom I was working.

In making those connections I became more comfortable in my new environment, gained several new resources that helped me do my job and do it well, and that really boosted my confidence in what I had to offer the institution and our community (which is what got me hired in the first place!). I think so often new professionals can get in their own way, by asking questions and making connections I was able to navigate around my barriers and have been thriving ever since.

Julia Leighow
Area Coordinator
The University of Scranton

Read as much office/institutional information as you can get your hands on, ask questions, listen, and ask more questions. It's imperative that you cultivate a sense of your office, division, and institutional cultures and contexts. Additionally, I think it is imperative that you focus on the task at hand and doing exceptional work. As a newer professional you can unwittingly [and with no intended malice at all] fall into a trap of trying to show and prove to everyone how smart you are, how much you know, and your ability to 'fix' everything and make it 'better.'

Unfortunately in many instances this can happen without having a full understanding of and appreciation for institutional context and historical perspective. Setting a solid foundation is the best way to ensure future success.

Marcus Langford
Director of Student Engagement
University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College

**When
training is
over and it's
time to
begin.**

The first few months on a job as a new professional can feel like a roller coaster. It can be tough, but this is normal! You're learning a new institution, establishing new relationships, and likely encountering new work situations. There will be highs and there will be lows. You will experience the excitement of the start of a new endeavor and you will probably question your competence at some point.

Make sure you have a good support network in place--a number of individuals you can go to to help process and make sense of your experience. During this time of transition, remember you are not alone.

Paul Gordon Brown
Acting Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students
Fashion Institute of Technology

Be realistic and authentic. It's easy to carry a level of idealism out of graduate school that isn't necessarily going to translate to the reality that is full-time employment. Don't lose yourself in those moments when this happens. Be who you are, have fun, laugh every day, and be a good teammate.

Matthew Jaskel
Area Director of Residence Life
Shepherd University

I would recommend each new professional take very seriously all onboarding and training provided by the University HR system, Equal Opportunity, Ethics and Compliance, SA Division, Department, etc. It is highly important to be aware of your employee responsibilities and your rights, especially those dealing with human resources and things that are often taken for granted like work hours, FMLA, vacation days, employee assistance, policies on job performance etc.

Most important of all, be certain that you are not only receiving ongoing feedback in your job, but that you be afforded the time to receive your annual performance evaluation and that you obtain your own copy. It's very exciting to be a student affairs professional, but you must never lose sight of what it means to be an employee as well for your benefit and that to the organization.

Shane Cadden
Advocate for authenticity & meaning-making
TeamCadden Consulting

Take advantage of the following:

- 1. Opportunity - There are thousands of new professionals looking for a job. You are fortunate to have this opportunity. Make the most of it!*
- 2. Experiences - As a new professional, there will be a multitude of new and exciting experiences. Step out of your comfort zone and join them!*
- 3. Knowledge - There are a plethora of mid-level and seasoned professionals on your campus that will support you and help you grow. Use them and listen to them!*

Jason Rizk
Residence Hall Director
Southern Connecticut State University

Say "yes" to things that sound interesting - assume that if someone else thinks you might be good or able to help with something, you just might. While you are new and can play the "new kid" card for any errors you make, be willing to step outside your comfort zone.

Karen Archambault
Executive Director Drexel Central
Drexel University

Take off the Cape. *This is something I've done my best to always live by, but I can't take credit for coming up with the superhero analogy. I was fortunate enough to sit in on a session at ACPA by James T. Robilotta about Learning Imperfectly and being authentic with our students. So thanks James! This one is particularly important to me as I have some of what we may consider the more difficult conversations with our students. In so many instances during conduct cases with students, if they ask, "You can't tell me you've never broken the rules (made a mistake, said something offensive)?" it's far easier for us to say "of course not- I always do what is 'right!'" (If this is truly you, more power to you, but I encourage you to dig deeper in your reflection). Putting yourself on this pedestal and wearing your Superman cape is tempting because you want to be a shining example for your students to follow. I can guarantee though, that far more students will be turned off by this than will be inspired by what a great person you are and want to follow you to the ends of the earth. A practice I (try to) live by (because we are all imperfect) is to share my real story. "Yes, I drank underage when I was in college. But this is the negative impact it had." "Sure, I've turned in paperwork late before. But let's talk about how my actions had a domino effect when my boss also had a deadline." I can honestly say some of the most genuine conversations I have had with my students occurred when I admitted I was fallible, and shared my own lessons learned. Just think, if we create a space where we can admit to our own imperfections, as long as we show how we are working to grow from them and take ownership of the problem, we show our students it is ok to do the same. If we create a space where we never admit to being anything less than perfect, we create an environment where our students feel pressured to do the same.*

Eric Petersen, M.S.
Area Coordinator
Stonehill College Residence Life

Always focus on the students; in everything you do, make sure students are at the forefront.

Mic Brunner
Student Life Coordinator
Newman University

A Few Final Words

*Never stop exploring. Landing a job is not the end, but rather the beginning of a new journey, so be sure to keep your curiosity and desire to learn. This new path and this exciting adventure is your opportunity to learn as much as you can through experience; not from what a book tells you or from what a professor tried to teach you. This is as real as it gets, your living, breathing, and (ever) changing laboratory to get messy, make mistakes, learn, and give back as much as you can as often as you can. **Don't waste this chance** to fill your metaphorical backpack with what you'll need for the winding path ahead.*

Lisa Endersby
Technology in Student Affairs Consultant
NASPA

About the Author

Sinclair is in the business of helping students live a better story at Mount St. Mary's University in Maryland. He has spoken for various organizations on topics of leadership, accountability, and conflict resolution. Sinclair is an editor for the Student Affairs Collective, and is happily married to Tynesha.

