

Submission for “Space for Reflection” in the Feb. 26 edition of The Current

### **Building a Campus Culture**

I had the opportunity several days ago to attend a conference on College Student Values in Tallahassee. Student values may not sound like a very exciting subject, but it was actually a pretty cool conference. A vice provost from Oregon State University, Larry Roper, described how his university dealt with a situation in which a fraternity member shot a homeless man in the alley behind his frat house. Dr. Roper also talked about a controversy involving the student paper printing a hateful editorial about Muslims and what happened on campus as a result. They set up a dialogue among campus community members, and powerful, emotional conversations took place. Eventually, some new friendships were formed, along with a lot of empathy and respect.

Another key speaker was a vice president for student affairs at Duke University. We all know about the case involving the strippers and the lacrosse team, right? This speaker, Larry Moneta, had a lot of interesting things to say. He commented that he’s seen a change in the overall attitude on college campuses—a change from dialogue to competition. One outcome of this change has been a much more polarized atmosphere, where people care more about their side “winning” than they care about learning from each other. He called this “the new norm,” and said he hoped those of us on college campuses would challenge this new norm. Dr. Moneta also said that at Duke, one of the steps they’ve taken has been to form a Campus Culture Initiative.

This got me thinking. After all, every college or university has a culture, whether it’s one that has been intentionally cultivated or one that has just come about without any particular thought behind it. (Actually, it’s simplistic to say there’s just one culture on a campus, but still, there tends to be an overriding spirit to a university community.) Do we have a campus culture here at NSU?

I went to my first CommunityFest the other day, and that had a good vibe, for sure! The tag line for the event refers to NSU Family, NSU Pride, NSU Spirit. And wow, there were a lot of NSU family members there, having fun, showing school spirit. If we can do more to develop school pride and spirit and the feeling of being part of a real university family, that would go a long way toward building a great campus culture.

One of the strengths of NSU is its diversity, in my opinion. Just having different “kinds” of people in our community doesn’t mean too much, though, if we don’t actually connect with one another and come to understand each other at least a little. Dr. Sylvia Hurtado, Director of UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute, was another speaker at the conference. She asked the question, “How do we train students for the society we want to become?” What a great question! And how do we students develop ourselves to be prepared for the multicultural, global society we live in? Interacting with each other here on campus, talking to each other about what really matters to us individually and collectively must be part of that preparation, I think.

Giving conscious thought to what kind of people we want to be, and what kind of community we want to create at NSU, is so important. What are the values we want to see lived on campus—whether our campus is in Davie, Las Vegas, Jacksonville, or any of our other sites? How can we bring those values to our interactions with other university community members? I’ll turn that question on myself: What values do I

want to see, and what can I do to live those values each day? I think these questions are part of creating a campus culture we will love being a part of.

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