

# Midcareer faculty and student personnel administrators gather in Phoenix for annual events

BY LISA KERN



Attendees exchange ideas during a discussion session at the 2016 Roundtable Seminar for Midcareer Faculty.

Participants of the 2016 Student Personnel Administrators' Conference attended workshops, listened to plenaries, networked, and engaged in discussions focusing on the theme *Creating Holistic and Seamless Learning Environments in Student Affairs* April 13 to 15, in Phoenix.

Tabitha Hightower, director of student financial planning, student housing, and international student life at McCormick Theological Seminary and vice chair of the planning committee for the conference, welcomed nearly 130 recruitment officers, admissions directors, financial aid officers, counseling staff, career services staff, housing staff, registrars, deans of students, and more to the annual conference.

The event began with a presentation on the state of theological education including the current progress of

two of the Association's current initiatives—Educational Models and Practices and Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers. Adhering to the theme, additional plenaries provided practical strategies on how to create “seamless learning environments” between academic and student services.

An outdoor “state of the profession” networking reception the first evening invited attendees to mingle and converse with those in their same areas of student personnel work including admissions and recruitment, cabinets and deans of students, career services, enrollment management, financial aid, housing and student life, and registrar.

“Being able to connect with peers in my same area of work was so valuable,” said one conference participant. “I would prefer two state of the profession sessions next time—those times of connections are awesome.”



Yvette Wilson-Barnes, associate dean for student affairs at Union Theological Seminary, presented a workshop on supporting students with psychiatric disabilities at the student personnel administrators' conference.

Peer-led workshops the next day covered a variety of topics in an effort to represent the diversity of student services personnel serving at ATS schools.

Music played a unique role in this year's conference.

Judy Deere, director of admissions and student services for Phillips Theological Seminary, sang a Cherokee hymn during Thursday morning's prayer session. Deere—a Native American of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Choctaw tribes—explained the meaning behind the hymn.

"The song I lifted up is a Muscogee (Creek) hymn titled "Heleluyvn." I shared with the group that morning I was told this song means they will be singing heleluyvn when they are up there and these songs were brought up the Trail of Tears."

In addition, Hightower had asked her former student—second generation student services personnel LaJeanne Grinnage of Chicago Theological Seminary—to sing during the final prayer session on Friday morning.

"Student affairs professionals attempt to make 'seamless' what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected experiences by bridging organizational boundaries and forging collaborative partnerships with faculty and others to enhance student learning."

—*"The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs," published by ACPA, College Student Educators International, 2013*

The closing plenary defined the distinct roles and skillsets of student personnel and offered examples of how attendees might "lead from the front lines" at their schools, contributing to fulfilling the overall mission of theological education.

The 2016 Roundtable Seminar for Midcareer Faculty was held April 15 to 17, also in Phoenix, to accomplish the following goals: foster a clearer understanding of the vocation as a theological educator, address how theological educators in midcareer can engage key issues in their schools, explore shifts in living out the theological educators' professional "second half," and promote the enhancement of professional relationships.

Nominated by their academic deans to attend, participants also had the option to take part in a preconference titled "Design a Seminary from Scratch"—the first of its kind for this event. Consultants Robert Weisbuch and David Grant of Robert Weisbuch and Associates, a consulting firm that assists colleges and universities with improving "the three C's of core identity,



"We're talking about change not for change's sake, but change for the sake of getting you better at the 'why' you've determined," explains David Grant, during the midcareer faculty seminar's preconference.

campus life, and collaboration," led the discussion about strategic thinking and institutional change.

"It's the 'good to great thing," explained Weisbuch, ". . . so many of us are satisfied with where we are, but the idea of the ideal and helping yourself and others journey toward that—joyfully—is within the capacity of the faculty."

Faculty seminars differ from other ATS events in that the majority of the agendas include faculty members reflecting on adjustments they face in the current stages of their careers—a new faculty seminar is held each fall and a midcareer faculty seminar is held each spring.

J. Matthew Ashley, associate professor of systematic theology and department chair at the University of Notre Dame Department of Theology and Mai-Anh Le Tran, associate professor of Christian education at Eden Theological Seminary, shared their thoughts on the integration of faculty roles.



L. Ann Jervis shares her reflections on her identity as "author" during the midcareer faculty seminar.

Willie James Jennings, associate professor of theology and Africana studies at Yale University Divinity School, and L. Ann Jervis, professor of New Testament at Wycliffe College, shared their thoughts regarding scholarship for broader publics.

In addition, panelists answered questions regarding global partnerships, innovative educational models, formation, and online engagement.

This format seems to be effective, as several participants weighed in with their comments:

"Faculty are brilliant and creative when they/we can speak as experts in our own right!"

"This is one of the best faculty-enriching seminars I have ever attended . . . I have become immensely inspired and challenged to be (more) proactive about my role and my voice for my institution."

The nomination and application process will begin next month for those interested in the 2016 Roundtable Seminar for Newly Appointed Faculty to be held in October.



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