

Knowing You Are Right for Student Affairs
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When I was an undergraduate at University of Wisconsin-River Falls, I would have never thought to have a career in student affairs. But here I am 12 years after graduating with a master's degree in education working toward a PhD, realizing that one day I could be a director of a student union, dean of students or vice president for student affairs. When students ask me how I got to be an assistant director of student activities, I tell them, "I had a great adviser, Kaye Schendel, say to me, 'Did you know you could do what I do?'"

I really didn't know what I wanted to do after I graduated. So, to have someone who I respected say, "Did you know you could do this for a career?" had quite an impact on me. However, as an advisor, I like to help students get started towards a career in student affairs earlier than I did, and I'd like to share the advice I give my own students. How do you know you are right for student affairs? I wish I could say there is a right answer to this question, but there isn't. However, it's important to believe that you can help students achieve their goals that you can help make a difference in someone's life.

There are times of the year where I wonder if I chose the right career. As many student affairs professionals know, our jobs can be challenging at times. Sometimes I go home at night thinking about whether I chose the appropriate occupation. I tell my students that I love doing what I do about 90 percent of the time, and the other 10 percent I am just learning something new.

Recently I attended a student rally on our campus. I was in the background watching one of my student leaders speak, feeling a great deal of pride in what she was doing as an individual to help make a difference in the world. One of my other students, who happened to be a graduating senior, looked at me and said, "What's up?" I just smiled and said how proud I was of the event and what the students were accomplishing at the rally. He smiled and said, "You taught us how to do this, Laura." That brought tears to my eyes. I can honestly say that is when I knew I was doing the right thing with my life.

Recognize that years from now, when you may be recalling how you got involved in student affairs, you may wonder what impact you are making with students. You may think about why you chose to live your life the way you did. You may wonder if one day a student will smile and look at you and say, "You helped me..." Or you may know how much impact you've had due to the successes your students' experience after graduation. And trust me—that knowledge is more special than anything you can possibly imagine.