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Jon C. Dalton Institute on College Student Values Reflection

The 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Jon C. Dalton Institute on College Student Values took place from Thursday, February 4 through Saturday, February 6, 2016. This year, the Dalton Institute's theme was: *Student Activism & Advocacy: Higher Education's Role in Fostering Ethical Leadership and Moral Commitment*. Each year, the Dalton Institute invites thought leaders, pillars of our profession, and cutting-edge researchers to engage participants in a conversation surrounding a topic as it relates to ethical leadership and moral commitment. The four keynotes this year included: Dr. Atira Charles, an Assistant Professor of Management at Florida A&M University; Dr. George Kuh, Professor of Higher Education Emeritus at Indiana University and founding director of the National Survey of Student Engagement; Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington, President and Founder of the Washington Consulting Group and the Social Justice Training Institute; and Dr. Penny Rue, Vice President for Campus Life at Wake Forest University and Director of Public Policy for NASPA. By attending the keynote addresses from each of these speakers and engaging in additional concurrent sessions, I was able to gain a tremendous amount of knowledge and ideas moving forward.

The first key takeaway I learned that will assist me as a new professional came from Dr. Atira Charles' keynote address. In talking about self-awareness and reflection, Dr. Charles stated, "We have to start the process with ourselves. We can't teach it if we can't live it." I found this statement to resonate with me immensely because as a first-generation, heterosexual,

Pakistani-American male who has lived in and out of poverty for the major of my life, I need to better understand the identities I carry and the experiences I bring into each environment. While I have become much more aware of my identities and past experiences, I need to continuously improve on the reflection and meaning-making component. Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington also spoke on the importance of awareness and owning your identities. Before beginning my first professional role, I intend on taking time to reflect at the end of every day. This will be important because I will likely serve in a capacity where students will look to me and model my behaviors.

The second key takeaway I gained from the Dalton Institute comes from the keynote address by Dr. George Kuh. He discussed the role of administrators and faculty of institutions and how advocacy and activism are managed or controlled. “All of us can do more to gain the trust of students,” Kuh exclaimed. Where does the foundation in building trust lie? The key to building trust is healthy, respectful, and open communication; in other words, to build trust, you need to build a relationship with a student or group. Dr. Kuh’s talk resonates with me as it will be crucial to build trust in my new environment – whether it is with students, faculty, or staff.

The third key takeaway I took was when Dr. Penny Rue noted in her keynote that the “most powerful leadership tool is empathy.” Without empathy there is no understanding, no compassion. We must understand the experiences of our students and listen to their stories. As student affairs professionals, “we have failed if we don’t engage students to look at moral and ethical issues beyond our campuses,” Dr. Rue continued. This is because the habits students gain in college can continue in life beyond the institution. It made me realize how special it is to be in a profession that educates and empowers the next generation of leaders. I vow to not only attentively listen to my students and get to know their stories, but also challenge and enable them to create positive change at the institutional level and in the greater community beyond college.