

A Jesuit University: Student Formation

Exploring the Jesuit and Catholic dimensions of the university's mission

Developmental psychology has provided an increasingly more persuasive framework for understanding both how college students learn and how they mature as human beings generally. The literature connecting developmental psychology and the college years is immense, but there are some helpful overviews of the overall framework:

- Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (Jossey Bass, 2000)
- William G. Perry, Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Schema* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970)

At Boston College, in the seminars for faculty and administrative staff initiated in 2001 by the Intersections Program (funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment), a wide ranging conversation about the role of faculty and administrators in students' development came to focus more and more on the theme of student formation. In 2005, it was decided to create a semester-long seminar of faculty, staff, and students to work out a more filled-in understanding of what student formation might mean.

The result was the publication of a booklet, [*The Journey Into Adulthood: Understanding Student Formation*](#) (Boston College, Intersections Program, 2007). Here student formation is conceptualized as an explicit and intentional approach to helping students move towards more critically aware forms of knowing, choosing, and living authentically. It has three interconnected dimensions—an intellectual dimension, a social dimension, and a spiritual dimension—and a student's growth along all three dimensions ideally moves toward integration. Fostering this integrative movement is the responsibility of all the adults in the university, whose roles give them different points of entry into students' lives, each of which is an opportunity to engage students in the kind of "expert conversation" that helps them pay attention to their experience, reflect on its meaning, and make good decisions in light of what they have learned—activities that mirror the fundamental dynamic of the Ignatian spirituality that animates Jesuit education's tradition and practice.

In 2009, a Center for Student Formation was created at Boston College, as part of the institution's ten-year strategic plan, to put into practice the ideas proposed in [*The Journey Into Adulthood*](#). The Center will focus on inviting faculty and student-affairs administrators into collaborative projects that foster students' reflective engagement with the varied dimensions of their college experience.