

# The overflowing Cup

TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF  
SO YOU CAN BETTER SERVE OTHERS

By

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**A**S A STUDENT PROGRAMMER, you spend much of your time and energy creating fantastic learning experiences for your fellow students. On behalf of all those who have benefitted from your efforts, we want to thank you! Although you know people are benefitting from your programming activities, did you know that giving to others actually benefits you, too? The positive psychology research indicates that by giving to others we receive a lot in return (Fredericksen, 2009; Grant, 2013). However, we have to balance giving to others with meeting our own needs.

A wise mentor reminded us recently that each of us is a cup and that we have to make sure we are taking good care of ourselves to ensure that our cup is full because we can give to others only out of the overflow of our cup. In other words, if you aren't taking good care of yourself, it is difficult to have the time, energy and stamina to help others. We believe the work you do as student activities programmers is positively impacting your fellow students, so our purpose is to share with you six specific tips for keeping your own cup full to ensure that you continue to have the internal resources to serve others.

### **Tip #1: Exercise**

Making time to keep yourself physically fit helps to keep you mentally and physically sharp. The research shows that people who engage in regular aerobic exercise have greater cognitive control (stay on task and learn better), as well as lowered stress, anxiety and depression levels (Bloom, Little, Phillips, and Robinson, submitted). Other benefits include higher levels of self-esteem, energy and positive body image (Biswas-Deiner & Dean, 2007). Making the time each day to engage in aerobic exercise will clearly benefit you mentally and physically.

### **Tip #2: Sleep**

You may think you need only five hours or less of sleep, but the National Sleep Foundation (2011) guidelines show that young adults need seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Little (2011) documented the importance of having a regular sleep routine and avoiding giving into the temptation to pull an all-nighter. Similar to exercise, sleep also helps decrease stress and depression levels while also increasing your ability to memorize material (Little, 2011).

### **Tip #3: Be Grateful**

Intentionally having an "attitude of gratitude" can help stave off negative emotions and deal with setbacks and adversity. Research by Michael McCullough has shown that gratitude is "linked to more helping behaviors, high positive emotions, life satisfaction, increased hope, and lower feelings of depression, anxiety, envy, as well as less materialistic attitudes" (Biswas-Deiner & Dean, 2007). One way to increase your gratitude is to write down in a journal five things you are grateful for once a week (Biswas-Deiner & Dean, 2007).

### **Tip #4: Be Authentic**

William Shakespeare said it best when he wrote, "To thine own self be true ... thou canst not then be false to any man." Authenticity is a process that works from the inside

out. Being authentic involves first understanding who you are and, secondly, being open to meeting others where they are on their journey of self-discovery. The Millennial Mentor, JuVan Langford, calls this process inner work and encourages young leaders to spend more time getting to know themselves (J.V. Langford, personal communication, Aug. 27, 2013). Everywhere you go you bring you along, so it is important to know who you are hanging out with all of the time. To be more authentic, take at least 15 minutes a day to get to know you and just be with yourself.

### **Tip #5: Make Meaningful Connections with Others**

Building and maintaining meaningful relationships with others helps keep your cup full. This goes a step beyond independence and focuses on becoming interdependent, which focuses on combining talents and abilities to create something great together (Covey, 1989). Barker (2013) provides specific suggestions for making meaningful connections with people, including sending a weekly email to thank a friend and/or family member, to follow up with a potential mentor, make plans to get together with a friend, or to check in with someone you recently met but do not know very well.

### **Tip #6: Pursue Your Passions**

Pursuing your passion often involves doing things that play to your strengths. Buckingham (2006) defines strengths as "activities that make you feel strong." He encourages people to reflect on the past week and identify activities that meet the following three criteria:

1. You looked forward to doing them;
2. While you were doing them, the time just flew by; and
3. Afterwards, you felt fulfilled.

Once you have determined your strengths, then intentionally figure out ways to incorporate more of those activities that make you feel strong into your upcoming weekly plans.

### **A Self-Reinforcing Life of Service Grounded in Self-Investment**

Although focusing on your own happiness may seem selfish, rest assured that taking the time to take care of yourself will ensure that you have the energy and resources to help others. The great thing about helping others is that by doing so you will actually add to your own happiness, effectiveness and self-efficacy: "While happy, upbeat individuals might have more energy to devote to helping others one longitudinal study also found that those who volunteered more hours also felt increased happiness" (Biswas-Deiner & Dean, 2007, p. 110). By following these six steps for ensuring that your own cup stays full, you will ensure that you can establish a self-reinforcing life of service to others that is grounded in self-investment opposed to self-sacrifice.

*Although focusing on your own happiness may seem selfish, rest assured that taking the time to take care of yourself will ensure that you have the energy and resources to help others.*

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## About the Authors



**Jennifer L. Bloom, EdD**, is a Clinical Professor and Director of the Master's degree program in the Higher Education & Student Affairs Program housed in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies at the **University of South Carolina**. She also directs the Office of Appreciative Education at the University of South Carolina, which sponsors the annual Appreciative Advising Summer Institute, an online Appreciative Advising course, the process for Certifying Appreciative Advisers, and other initiatives related to Appreciative Advising and Appreciative Education. She previously served as the Associate Dean for Student Affairs & the Medical Scholars Program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Urbana-Champaign. She earned her doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received the USC Black Graduate Student Association's Faculty Mentor Award, as well as the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Urbana-Champaign's Senior Class Special Tribute Award. In 2011, she was named the Faculty Partner of the Year by the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support at the University of South Carolina. Bloom has co-authored four books, five book chapters, and 20 articles. Her fourth book, *Increasing Persistence: Research-based Strategies for College Student Success*, co-authored with Wesley Habley and Steve Robbins, was released in July 2012. In addition, she has delivered more than 19 national webinars and 160 presentations on her work at institutions and conferences across the country.



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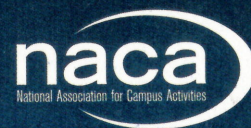
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## NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

**Creating Nontraditional Programming for Nontraditional Students..... 7**  
By Nicholas J. Smith, Davenport University (MI)

**Inclusive Programming Practices for Nontraditional Students ..... 11**  
By Jennifer Farlow and Lauren Koppel, Michigan State University

## PROGRAMMING AT URBAN/TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

**Tips and Tricks for Programming at a Two-Year College..... 14**  
By Abbie Alsene, Illinois Central College, and Cassidy Childress, Illinois State University

**Big-City Programming:  
Tips for Producing Events at an Urban Institution..... 40**  
By Tegan Klevorn, University of Missouri-St. Louis

## DIVERSITY

**Beyond International Education Week:  
The Importance of International Programming..... 18**  
By Ryan Lloyd, University of South Carolina

**Making the Case for Allyhood: Inclusive Programming on Campus.....22**  
By Sam Al-Khoury and Sha'terika Perkins, University of Washington Bothell

**Picture Perfect/Imperfect:  
An Exercise for Understanding How We See Diversity in Our Lives.....26**  
By Julie Fontana, University of the Pacific

## PROGRAM AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

**Teaching Leadership Together:  
Programming Partnerships Enhance the Student Experience..... 28**  
By David Cooper, Texas Christian University; Lucas Novotny, Creighton University (NE); Christina M. Coovert, Texas Christian University; Amanda LaGrone, Texas Christian University; and Brad Thompson, Texas Christian University

**Brain Games: Engaging Faculty and Students in Trivia and Academic Competitions..... 36**  
By Ellen Wehrman, Marietta College (OH)

**It's Time to "Green Up" Your Programming:  
Ways to Engage Students in Campus Sustainability Goals..... 44**  
By Lacey Filkins, Kenyon College (OH)

**The Overflowing Cup: Take Good Care of Yourself So You Can Better Serve Others .... 48**  
By Jennifer L. Bloom, University of South Carolina, and Tyree Vance, California State University-Dominguez Hills

**Grassroots Leadership: Students Empowering Students..... 51**  
By Sophia Fouquet, University of Alaska-Anchorage

