Francis F. Bradshaw: A Southern Student Personnel Pioneer

Image 3  Francis F. Bradshaw, Dean at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill from the early 1920s through the 1940s. Courtesy of the American College Personnel Association Archives (MS-319); Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

R. Schwartz, Deans of Men and the Shaping of Modern College Culture
© Robert Schwartz 2010
At the 1931 meeting of the National Association of Deans of Men in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, a spirited discussion about the preparation needed to be a dean of men took place. Most of the deans of men expressed the belief that the best preparation to be a dean of men was to be “born” to the position. In short, the assembled deans believed that specific training or even graduate education would do little to prepare a man to be a dean if he didn’t have the right temperament for the job. However, Bursley continued,

There is one place where I believe preparedness is absolutely essential to the success of a dean of men—that is in the selection of a wife. The very best preparation he can have for his work is to marry the right woman. If she is the right kind, a dean’s wife does just as much to earn his salary as he does, and if she is not, he might as well quit before he starts.

The lone dissenting voice challenging this idea belonged to Francis F. Bradshaw, dean of students at the University of North Carolina. An active participant in the new “personnel movement,” Bradshaw made his feelings known.

In our deanly world we are not saved by any training processes whatsoever. This makes it a little difficult to talk about the dean of men’s preparation for his work. The last speaker, however, gave me some hope through his statement that while “deans were born and not made,” they might be made better by preparation. The deanship stands to some extent at a fork in the road...whether we are to be solely campus disciplinarians or whether we are to be administrative coordinators of the whole individual student and...of group life of students. The discovery of the genuineness and permanence of individual differences by modern psychological science, the rapid expansion of our campus communities, ...set up a demand for an administrative...office resting on these fundamental points of view.

Bradshaw’s comments countered the dominant point of view at the NADM meetings. But then, Bradshaw was not like many of the other deans present. He had been Dean of Students at North