

BOOK REVIEW

Involvement in Campus Activities and the Retention of First-Year College Students (Monograph No. 36)

T.L. Skipper & R. Argo (Eds.)

Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. 2003.

Reviewed by: *Darrell C. Ray, PhD, Art Institute of Atlanta*

Previous educational research has shown high correlations between student involvement and retention in higher education (Astin, 1984; Pascarella & Terrinzini, 1991). The increasingly competitive nature of higher education recruitment and the consumer mentality of prospective students have caused institutions to take more purposeful steps in retaining students. As a part of a series of collaborations among higher education associations, this monograph addresses campus involvement and the retention of first-year students. Through each chapter the authors provide readers with sound justification for services in difficult budgetary times. The text further addresses the need for out of the class activities to be educationally sound to impact persistence.

The introduction outlines current research on student retention, models of student departure and student involvement and providing a frame of reference for reading subsequent chapters. A critical assertion presented is the importance of integrating involvement and the curriculum to impact persistence. Student characteristics impacting persistence including race/ethnicity, gender, academic achievement and resident versus commuters are discussed. It concludes with involvement's role in integrating students to the campus environment and an overview of the volume.

The initial chapter focuses on the educational value of involvement outside of the classroom. The creation of a seamless learning environment through policy design and

practice called for to purposefully impact students. The authors utilize Kuh's (1993) typology to categorize existing literature into outcomes and engagement in activities beyond the classroom that are linked to growth and development. The outcome domains examined are cognitive complexity; knowledge acquisition and application; humanitarianism; inter- and intrapersonal communication; and practical competence (p. 1-2). Summary tables provide readers with the impact of involvement on certain types of out of classroom activities. Living on campus, membership in honor societies, participation in intercollegiate activities, and service learning and volunteering are just a few examples of activities covered. It is important to note that these characteristics can all be impacted by pre-college characteristics. From the review of existing literature five conclusions arise.

Chapter two uses the 1960s as a benchmark to examine the impact of societal changes on higher education. Six broad categories summarize characteristics of contemporary college students. Beyond those characteristics, the author provides ways educators can modify offerings to respond to the needs of today's students. Concluding with three recommendations for future practice for student activity educators the chapter provides many salient points on effecting change. Chapter three reviews the role of involvement on the lifespan of a students' college career. With Astin's (1984) work on involvement as a basis it is asserted that more opportunities for merging out of class and in class learning as beneficial to the student and the institution. With learning as the stated objective of involvement the authors examine populations of students that may not be involved and move into the developmental effects of involvement. Personal narratives from students are provided to demonstrate the applicability of involvement theories. It

concludes with a review of a mixed-method designed study conducted by the authors to explore involvement patterns over the college life span. Comprehensive recommendations for practice are offered from the results and a Campus Involvement Survey is included as an appendix.

Chapter four addresses the needs of building community on a commuter campus. In addition to the support of current literature for their argument, the authors describe both challenges to building community as well as opportunities for building community. Attention is given the need for faculty support and collaborative efforts of both student affairs and academic affairs. The significance of developing campus rituals and traditions on a commuter campus are also acknowledged. The following chapter addresses involvement as it relates to distance learners. As presented, the shift in methods of instruction with the rise of distance education requires educators to rethink the methods of service delivery. Providing a basic historical reference as to the development of distance learning, the chapter acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of distance learners and expounds on the role of student development educators. Several policy considerations are identified as well as models of service delivery are provided.

Curricular and co-curricular leadership program development is the focus of chapter six in which the benefit to the campus and the student are delineated. In addition to describing exemplary models of these types of programs for first-year students a process model for enhancing leadership education and development is provided. The detailed nature of the process model allows for easy adaptation to various campus environments. The next chapter is a case study of an institution's attempt to provide alternative activities. The case centers on an institution's attempt to alter campus norms

and behavior by providing extensive campus programming as an alternative to unhealthy choices. Through precise definition of the problem and the steps taken throughout the change process the case allows readers to transplant their institution into the model. Effects of changes and statistical information are also useful references. The supplemental appendix is a timeline of the activities and descriptions of each activity.

Chapter eight focuses on assessment strategies in program and policy design related to campus activities. Stating the importance of activities as a method of transmitting campus culture, the author makes available support for assessment of all first-year co-curricular activities. Data yielded from assessment offers support for intentional institutional efforts to alter culture. Beyond stating the importance for contextualizing efforts based on specific campus environments, an overview of national efforts is offered. A set of practitioner developed principles of effective assessment has been broadened to assess campus activities. Each principle is applied to first-year co-curriculum.

The final chapter addresses the need for a synergistic relationship between student and academic affairs. Beginning by addressing the increasing competitive nature of higher education and its ties to the ever-changing economy the chapter highlights the need for accountability and results in creating sustained and purposeful change. A thorough model for the change process allows readers to develop a campus specific model for creating change in their environment.

The text offers valuable information to practitioners through supporting literature, clear application methods, and resources for future practice. The wide scope of information covered can be extremely useful to new professionals and those campus

activities professionals. Transformation change can developed with the use of the information provided in this monograph.

References

Astin, A.W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education.

Journal of College Student Personnel, 25, 297-308.

Kuh, G. D. (1993). Ethos: Its influence on student learning. *Liberal Education*, 79, (4),

22-31.

Pascarella, E.T. & Terrenzini, P. (1991). *How college affect students*. San Francisco:

Jossey-Bass.