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Foundations of Student Affairs Practice: How Philosophy, Theory, and Research Strengthen Educational Outcomes

Florence A. Hamrick, Nancy J. Evans, and John H. Schuh; (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc, 2002).

Reviewed by Adam D. Moore

As student affairs became an increasingly more important and distinct partner in higher education, a significant philosophical and theoretical tradition emerged to provide a basis for the profession. With the growth of the student affairs profession, institutions of higher education began requiring student affairs professionals to identify and pursue specific outcomes in their programs and practices. In their recent publication, *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice*, Florence A. Hamrick, Nancy J. Evans, and John H. Schuh contend that a significant disconnect exists between the philosophical and theoretical foundations of student affairs, and the recent surge of literature related to student outcomes. *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice* is an effort by Hamrick, et al. to bridge the gap between these areas of examination by bringing together the philosophical and theoretical foundations of student affairs with specific practices designed to produce positive student outcomes. With their publication, Hamrick, et al. have provided a competent manual to assist student affairs professionals who are challenged by their institutions to rationalize the continuation or implementation of existing or proposed student life programs.

Foundations of Student Affairs Practice is divided into three sections: 1) an overview of the historical, theoretical, and philosophical foundations of student affairs; 2) a discussion of five broad student outcomes; and 3) a conclusion proposing implications for practice and additional research. Part One begins with an examination of the changing nature of institutional missions in higher education. Hamrick, et al. summarize the evolution of missions in higher education in both the dramatic growth in the variety of institutional missions and in the evolution in higher education with regards to instructional methods. Following their discussion of institutional mission, the authors provide a comprehensive review of the student development theory that informs student affairs practice. The implications of this chapter reveal the value of theory in aiding both the development of appropriate student outcomes and the design of programs intended to promote the designated outcomes. The final chapters of Part One discuss the influence of campus environments on student outcomes and the contribution of student affairs to student learning in higher education. The presentation of theories related to campus environments supports the authors' conclusion that purposefully constructed environments aid in producing positive student outcomes. The authors conclude Part One with a review of the current emphasis upon student learning as the primary objective of student affairs, and a challenge to student affairs administrators to reach this goal by increasing the partnership between academic and student affairs.

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In Part Two, the authors discuss five broad student outcomes in relation to student development theories. They also consider possible practices that may contribute to the realization of these outcomes. The five outcomes addressed in this section include: 1) a self-aware and interpersonally sensitive individual; 2) a democratic citizen; 3) an educated person; 4) a skilled worker; and 5) a life skills manager. Each of these outcomes are discussed in separate chapters. The general discussion of these outcomes begins with a thorough definition of the outcome and its value for students and society. Subsequently, the authors use numerous related student development theories to justify the importance of each outcome. Each chapter in Part Two concludes with an analysis of practical examples of college experiences that produce the desired outcomes, and the implications for practitioners in student affairs, faculty members, senior executive officers, and other relevant leaders in colleges and universities. In concluding the book, Hamrick, et al. utilize Part Three to briefly provide recommendations for practice and further research. These recommendations give student affairs professionals a resource for improving campus life and institutional research.

Foundations of Student Affairs Practice is a very useful resource for student affairs professionals who desire to focus on student outcomes. The authors' argument concerning the need for student affairs professionals to connect philosophy, theory, and research with educational outcomes is an important and relevant issue in higher education. Overall, Hamrick et al. successfully connect these foundations of student affairs with student outcomes, while also offering practical methods for developing these particular outcomes in students' lives. The book certainly provides a strong rationale for integrating the areas of student affairs philosophy, theory, and research with student outcomes. As a result, the primary utility of the book appears twofold. First, the book helps both established and novice student affairs professionals to understand the need for a connection between the foundations of student affairs and particular student outcomes. In addition, the authors' examination is also a useful reference for those in higher education who must provide a rationale for current or future student life initiatives.

However, two primary weaknesses are evident in *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice*. The first weakness lies in the method of presentation utilized by the authors. At times, the authors' constant repetition of student development theories becomes a hindrance to the presentation of their argument. In each of the chapters concerning the five student outcomes, the authors relate specific theories to the individual outcome.

When using these theories, the authors often summarize the main points of each student development theory. In some cases, frequently used theories are summarized or discussed numerous times throughout the book. This practice becomes redundant and distracting from the primary purpose of the book. Rather than continuously citing the points of individual theories, the authors should have offered additional examples for relating theories to student outcomes. The second weakness of the book relates to the five outcomes the authors chose to use for the book. These five outcomes are certainly valid outcomes for higher education, but the authors present very little discussion of how and why these particular outcomes were chosen. However, in spite of these two weaknesses, the overall value of the book and its significance for student affairs professionals still remains apparent.

Although not written from the perspective of the Christian worldview, *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice* does prove relevant and worthy of use by Christians in student affairs. The book is particularly useful in reminding professionals of the importance of connecting philosophy, theory and research with student affairs practice. The challenge for Christians in student development, however, is to incorporate the Christian philosophy of education and worldview into the basis for determining student outcomes. Issues such as faith development and spiritual growth are only briefly discussed by Hamrick, et al, and are unrelated to their five student outcomes. These types of issues are obviously very significant for Christian student affairs professionals, particularly those at private Christian colleges and universities, who are especially concerned about these types of outcomes. In summary, *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice* is a helpful resource for all student affairs professionals but Christians in student affairs must work to critically incorporate the significant foundations of Christian higher education into the overall perspective presented by the authors of this book.