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Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter.

Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J.H., & Whitt, E.J.

Reviewed by Treva Barham

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In an age where more and more students are pursuing higher education, there are more students that are entering college that are not well prepared for the transition. As a result institutions need to provide services to assist students. *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* explores the world of practices for student success. This book provides an overview of 20 institutions that have established policies and practices for helping students to be successful in college. The authors introduce the concept of “Documenting Effective Educational Practice” (DEEP) and highlight the need for this research which forms the underpinnings for this book.

The DEEP project highlights institutions that have excelled at providing a model for student success. The authors note that previous projects provided research on the frequency of activities such as: learning communities, service learning, collaborative learning, and other effective practices; however, previous research has failed to adequately provide the quality of the experiences or the effectiveness in relation to other practices. In response, this book provides a comprehensive understanding of activities that benefit students in this age of under preparedness, assisting them in success.

After summarizing the need for this research, the authors discuss the six shared aspects among the 20 institutions, including: a “living” mission and “lived” educational philosophy; an unshakeable focus on student learning; environments adapted for educational enrichment; clearly marked pathways to student success; an improvement oriented ethos; and, shared responsibility for educational quality and student success. The researchers also found that these institutions had a significant impact on student success. After a review of the DEEP institutions, the authors provide examples of policies, programs, and practices that could be tailored to fit other colleges to increase student engagement.

Since the sampled institutions are diverse in mission, size, and population, it can be assumed that their practices are applicable to institutions with dissimilar characteristics. The authors provide an overview of practical applications followed by a discussion of theoretical implication and general recommendations. To demonstrate the effective practices of DEEP institutions, the authors include a discussion that centers on the five clusters from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey. These clusters include: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interaction with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment.

The DEEP Project was conducted by 24 researchers with backgrounds in research, student affairs, and academia. The researchers identify institutions that achieve high levels of student engagement and graduation rates. The team first used regression analysis to determine the institutions with “higher-than-predicted” scores on the five clusters of effective educational practice on the NSSE survey. After the initial identification of institutions, 20 were selected to represent a variety of institutional types and to narrow the breadth of information to include practices that could be adopted by various institutions. This book provides an overview of research methodology including sampling, data collection, and analyses.

Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter can be helpful to new and seasoned professionals alike. As the reader walks through the findings of the DEEP Project, they may be introduced to new ideas as well as affirmed current practices of their institution. The authors organize the book in such a way that the reader can read it in its entirety for the broader scope of information and also use it to reference specific topics. To illustrate the practices that distinguish DEEP institutions, the authors provide specific institutional examples to provide a deeper understanding of the concepts. The authors caution the reader to use this book as a “blueprint” since there are many ways to engage students. Rather, they encourage professionals to use it as a review of best practices that can be adapted and applied to other institutions. This book is an excellent resource for enriching current programming as well as providing a starting point for new student success initiatives.

Some readers may find the amount of information overwhelming; however, it is an excellent resource for student affairs practitioners, academic affairs administrators, and faculty. This book reveals the impact that specific areas have on student success and demonstrates that the entire university community plays a role in student success. Since the 20 institutions are diverse in mission, size, and population, most readers will identify with at least one presented, including Christian higher education. Many of the practices presented can be tailored to fit with the missions of these institutions. In addition, many of the ideas on how an institution serves and supports students are consistent with the desire of Christian institutions to equip students to go into the world to serve.

George Kuh has contributed significantly to the areas of student engagement, assessment, and institutional enhancement through writings and consulting with more than 150 institutions and agencies. He currently serves as Chancellor’s Professor of Higher Education at Indiana University-Bloomington and directs the Center for Postsecondary Research that oversees National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Jillian Kinzie serves as Associate Director of the NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice and was Project Manager for the DEEP Project. She has worked and taught in the area of student affairs. John Schuh has assumed administrative and faculty roles at Wichita State University, Indiana University-Bloomington, and is currently serving at Arizona State University as distinguished professor of educational leadership. He has authored, coauthored, or edited over 200 publications. Elizabeth Whitt serves as a professor in the College of Education at the University of Iowa. In addition to serving as a faculty member, she has served in student affairs administration and currently coordinates the graduate programs in student affairs administration at the University of Iowa.