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Encouraging Authenticity & Spirituality in Higher Education

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Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm. Encouraging Authenticity & Spirituality in Higher Education

Reviewed by Sam Shellhamer

Arthur Chickering introduced his seven developmental vectors for college students in 1969 in his book, *Education and Identity*. This was during a time when “value-less” education was in vogue. Chickering described the development of integrity, one of the seven vectors, in this manner: “...the clarification of a personally valid set of beliefs that have some internal consistency and that provide at least a tentative guide for behavior” (p. 17). Almost 40 years later, post-modernism pervades the academy and the prevailing attitude is “you believe what you want to believe and I will believe what I want to believe.”

In *Encouraging Authenticity & Spirituality in Higher Education*, Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm focus upon a holistic development of college students and how the total collegiate experience impacts their growth. These three authors bring decades of experience in the field of higher education and they recognize and assert the importance of spirituality in the lives of college students. They define authenticity in terms of congruity between what one says and what one does. “Being authentic means that what you see is what you get (p. 8). They describe spirituality in a very broad manner, not just in terms of personal religious beliefs, but include a commitment to inner development that includes one’s total being. This is very similar to Chickering’s description of integrity in *Education and Identity*, which was written almost 40 years ago.

This book is a refreshing acknowledgement of the value and the influence of spirituality among college students. The book is laid out in three major areas. The first section, “Framing Perspectives,” lays out the historical and cultural implications as to why spirituality is an important dynamic in higher education. “Institutional Amplification” is the second section and considers the challenges and appropriate changes needed for spirituality to become an integral part of the academy. The last section, “Getting There from Here” deals with the challenges of assessing spirituality and enabling spirituality to become an inclusive aspect of college life.

One of the truly unusual and delightful aspects of this book is found in the first chapter. All three authors provide a personal reflection upon their career in higher education and why spirituality is of significant interest to them. This personal perspective is seldom found in the literature in higher education. It is extremely helpful in laying out a context for the entire book and should not be overlooked. Jon Dalton, in particular, is to be commended for his leadership in establishing and hosting the annual Institute on College Student Values at Florida State University for the past 15 years. It provides a good venue for student development professionals from faith-based colleges to actively engage with professionals from secular institutions on the topics of values and spirituality.

Encouraging Authenticity & Spirituality in Higher Education is a valuable resource for anyone engaged in higher education, and not just for those who work at faith-based or parochial institutions. The authors define spirituality in a broader sense than most student development professionals would who serve at Christian colleges. However, there is value for those who work in Christian higher education to be challenged to think beyond their own community as to the meaning of spirituality. Even though some institutions might define themselves as more spiritually focused, the spiritual dimension is universal to any college or university student.

Dalton makes a very direct statement about the lack of leadership in the area of spirituality: "...student affairs professionals have not been influential advocates for the place of spirituality in the higher education setting. They have often failed to recognize the centrality of spirituality in the identity development of students during the college years..." (p. 147). Stamm asserts that moral leadership among student affairs staff must be strengthened. She points out that student affairs professionals are role models and do influence the institutional environment and students. Stamm states that "administration is not leadership" (p. 254). She offers the following challenge: "...we need to encourage our administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals to become true leaders through living their own visions for amplifying our institutional environments." (p. 253).

She goes on to suggest that leaders must have a vision for creating a culture of values and purpose.

The authors identify some of the challenges related to spirituality that are of particular interest for those of us who serve in faith-based institutions. These include: the challenge of seeking congruity between the espoused core values of the institution and what experience reveals, clearly defining a mission statement and desired outcomes for all students, and assessing institutional influence upon the spiritual growth of students. In the past decade, accrediting bodies have begun holding college and universities accountable for assertions made about the values of the institution and the influence upon students. An assessment of relying upon testimonials and personal stories is no longer sufficient. Evaluating the spiritual aspect of students' lives is challenging, but nevertheless necessary and exceedingly important.

Encouraging Authenticity & Spirituality in Higher Education is a valuable resource for anyone involved in the college or university setting. It is of particular value for the student development professional working at faith-based colleges because it affirms the spiritual focus and vision of such institutions and it provides a comprehensive approach

to the spiritual growth of students and how they are influenced by their collegiate experience. Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm are to be commended for their contribution to a more holistic view of students and how spirituality places a formative role in their personal development.

Additional Resources:

- Garber, Steven (1996), *The Fabric of Faithfulness*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Holmes, Arthur F. (1991), *Shaping Character: Moral Education in the Christian College*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Litfin, Duane (2004), *Conceiving the Christian College*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Parks, Sharon. (1986), *The Critical Years*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Tisdell, Elizabeth J. (2003), *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.