Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community

Mary Ann Searle
Palm Beach Atlantic University

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Gary L. Kramer & Associates; (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

Reviewed by Mary Ann Searle

The first questions asked in this book are, "What? Another book about student services?" and "Who needs it?" Rather than simply being another book about how to create programs and services to improve student success, this book discusses the infrastructure and institutional values needed to support a "student-centered culture." The authors suggest that higher education institutions need to put students first. As educators, we need to align the needs and expectations of students with the institution, identify how students are progressing towards graduation, show evidence of student learning outcomes in the classroom and outside the classroom, and work collaboratively to promote success for all students on our campuses. Since this is not just the responsibility of student development professionals, this book is also relevant for senior administrators and faculty.

"Part I: Communicating Expectations" examines and defines the responsibilities of policymakers, senior administrators, faculty, and student development professionals for creating campus environments that encourage students to succeed by understanding and meeting their expectations. A major premise of part I is that the demographics of college students are changing with increases in women, part-time students who work full-time, students of color (especially Hispanics), first generation, non-documented immigrants, adults over 25 years of age, and transfer students. Institutions need to examine their policies, procedures, and practices and "think outside the box" to promote success for all students (many of whom will be different than the generations of our senior administrators, faculty, and student sevelopment professionals).

In particular, the authors recommend that institutions can create student-centered campus cultures and meet students' expectations through the following:

- a clear, coherent mission and philosophy
- language and traditions that support student success
- a focus on student learning inside the classroom and outside the classroom
- high performance expectations for all students
- utilization of effective educational practices (e.g. active, collaborative learning)
- human/small scale settings (e.g. living-learning communities)
- collaborative, improvement-oriented work ethic
- assessment to measure organizational responsibilities and manage change
- a talented faculty and student development professionals who understand the complexities of higher education in today's marketplace

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"Part II: Connecting Services" describes the student services that are essential for putting students first in the college community. Part II begins with the admissions process where enrollment management professionals are encouraged to put students first by demonstrating good ethical practices in recruitment and looking for strong "student-institution fit" that will enhance student retention to graduation. In particular, admissions counselors need to be honest about the institutional mission, values, and characteristics, so prospective students can make well-informed decisions that meet and exceed their expectations. Once students are enrolled, institutions are encouraged to develop one-stop service centers and/or self-service portals to help students and parents access important information about the institution and conduct business (e.g. orientation, registration, financial aid, student accounts, career services, parking, ID cards, transcript requests, graduation audits, online tutoring). In addition, institutions should invest in learning technologies that transform professional practice in ways that use technology to "foster connections" between students and the institution and "bridge the gap" between the curricular and the co-curricular.

The authors dedicate an entire chapter to creating academic advising programs and services that promote student success. Academic advising needs to be seen as more than "information giving" for the purpose of selection and scheduling of academic courses. Rather, academic advising should be a *process* characterized by a student-centered relationship that focuses on students' potential; the belief that students are growing, maturing, responsible, and capable of self-direction; and shared responsibilities between the students and academic advisors. This relationship should focus on the students' personal characteristics/strengths, personal and professional goals for the future, an action plan for achieving his or her goals, and assessment of progress/updating of goals. In addition, an entire chapter is dedicated to career advising, so institutions can understand the importance of assessing students' career needs, providing excellent career services grounded in career development theory, and helping students develop a plan of action.

"Part III: Fostering Student Development" emphasizes student readiness, learning partnerships in higher education institutions, the organization of services for learning inside the classroom and outside the classroom, preparing service providers, and engaging faculty in fostering student success. The authors discuss how to train student development professionals to assess learning outcomes; partner with students to promote learning; and demonstrate the difference in goals, objectives, strategies, and learning outcomes from "service providers" to "educators." Ultimately, the goal is to engage in "learning-centered practice" in the classroom and outside the classroom to promote holistic student development and partner with academic affairs to promote student success. They also suggest that college is a time to encourage students to explore meaning and purpose for their lives. Although this can be very challenging for non-faith-based institutions, students who engage in this level of self-exploration tend to experience greater satisfaction with themselves and their collegiate experience, study more and earn higher grades, engage in community service, and party less.

Traditional and progressive models for higher education are described in detail and "best practices" are showcased to demonstrate that higher education institutions need to create organizational structures that put students first and promote student success. Once the structures are agreed upon, institutions have a responsibility to provide

faculty and staff development programs that help everyone understand students' needs and institutional expectations, delineate shared roles and responsibilities, and link effectiveness to established faculty and staff reward systems. In particular, institutions that are concerned about promoting student success should create "best practices level" faculty advising programs that focus on "advising as teaching."

"Part IV: Achieving Success" describes interventions to retain students, especially during the first year at two-year colleges, and the importance of academic advising to foster student success. Although we have learned that there are individual student characteristics and institutional interventions that contribute to retention, degree completion rates did not significantly improve between 1975 – 2005. In fact, the "time to degree" has increased over time which suggests that more students are not taking the traditional "four year route to college graduation." The authors suggest that we need to change our "retention paradigm" to a "student success paradigm" which is characterized by students' expectations and needs (e.g. multiple institutions, stop-out, life transitions, online learning, credit for life experiences) rather than institutional needs (e.g. time to degree). The authors wrap up this book by focusing on six pathways to putting students first in the campus community:

- establish a living mission
- connect academic and career planning
- assess learning outcomes
- blend technology—high tech + high touch + high effect
- reward and recognize success
- deliver the goods and be accountable

The key questions addressed in this book are:

- What do good institutions do beyond the routine or expected to actually create and achieve a student-centered environment or culture of student success?
- What are the essential or common ingredients found in successful programs?
- What does the research suggest as the next steps that institutions should consider to promote student success?
- What do institutions and student services providers need to do better to align expectations, connect services, actively foster student development, and consistently achieve results through student-oriented services and programs?

Mary Ann Searle is the vice president for student development at Palm Beach Atlantic University.

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