



Working With Students in Community Colleges: Contemporary Strategies for Bridging Theory, Research, and Practice

Kelsay, Lisa S.; and Zamani-Gallaher, Eboni M., eds.
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2014

Book Review

Tags: community college | student development | student learning

Reviewed by: Katherine Daley-Bailey, *University of Georgia*

Date Reviewed: November 30, -0001

Community Colleges have historically faced numerous challenges, many generated by the very nature of their missions. The three parts of this text flesh out the theory, research, and practice most germane to the history, current state, and future of the American community college, as well as the various student populations community colleges now serve. The three sections ask readers to understand (Part I: “Understanding Today’s Community College Campuses”), support (Part II: “Welcome to Campus: Supporting Today’s Community College Learners”), and look closer at populations often underrepresented in higher education literature (Part III: “A Closer Look: Specialized Populations and Communities on Two-Year Campuses”).

Understanding today’s community college campuses requires a review of the evolution of community colleges since their inception in 1900. Kelsay and Oudenhoven, in “Junior Grows Up: A Brief History of Community Colleges,” trace the origin of the American community college back to Joliet Junior College which is “now recognized as the oldest community college in the nation” (5). With a decade-by-decade overview of education in the community college setting, these authors document the vicissitudes of the life of the community college. From the GI Bill in 1944, increased enrollments of women and minorities in the 1960s, the return of Vietnam Vets, the career-focused students of the 1980s, to reduced financial support from state governments, Kelsay and Oudenhoven explicate how community colleges have risen up to meet the needs of their communities. However, these same schools face increasing pressures and challenges today and in the future.

John L. Jamrogowicz illuminates these challenges in his chapter, “Community College Economic Climate, Policy Landscape, and the American Graduation Initiative.” The AGI (American Graduation Initiative) spearheaded by President Obama “showcased community colleges as potential engines to drive the recovery from the Great Recession and a return of American dominance by increasing the proportion of the population with a college education” (19). Attempting to shoulder such a heavy ideological burden and with only \$2 billion of the desired \$12 billion for grants allocated, it is not difficult to surmise why community colleges continue to struggle to meet federal expectations.

Other chapters in Part I, such as “College Readiness and the Open-Door Mission” suggest readers look to the issues involved in the open-door mission: primarily, the need for remedial education and helping students persist to the completion of their programs. These authors cite the National Center for Education Statistics from 2011 which found that “more than 70 percent of students who first enroll in community colleges possess at least one factor and 50 percent possess two or more factors that are known to place a student at risk of not succeeding in college” (34). Procter and Uranis’s chapter on the role of technology on the community college campus also demonstrates how these institutions face a variety of resource challenges because they serve more students who may “lack a home computer and rely on the college for access to hardware, software, and Internet connectivity” (48). Financial woes, the necessity of remedial education courses, the challenge of student persistence, and students’ heavy dependence on college resources are just some of the realities those working with and inside community colleges must come to understand.

The authors contributing to Part II demonstrate how imperative it is that faculty and staff know their students and contribute to and foster collaboration between academics, student affairs, and advising professionals, as well as residence life staff. The chapter “Who are Our Students?” presents a fascinating, albeit brief, overview of the diversity of students attending community colleges. Some striking statistics indicate that the average age of a community college student is 28 and, according to the American Association of Community Colleges in 2013, “59 percent of full-time community college students were employed part-time” and “40 percent of part-time community college students were employed full-time” (57-58).

Support is a recurring theme in McFadden and Mazeika’s chapter on the collaboration between academic and student affairs. These authors utilize Student Development Theory (SDT) as a theoretical foundation that assists members of various sectors of the college to collaborate for student success. This chapter addresses how a theoretical foundation, facilitation of student engagement, and a model of shared responsibility among academic and student affairs professionals all contribute to assisting students.

Many community colleges are instituting mandatory orientation sessions. Jessica Hale's chapter links theories of psychosocial development of students and environmental factors known to influence development with various elements of orientation. While Hale describes the large disparity between various community colleges' orientation programs (number of sessions, mandatory or voluntary, online or face-to-face), the author also affirms that there is evidence to suggest "that participation in orientation increases persistence from term to term" (86). While residence life may be more commonplace on four-year campuses, Barber and Phelan note that, as of 2013, nearly 25 percent of community colleges "offer on-campus housing" (95). This number is astounding considering the diverse student populations community colleges typically serve. These authors emphasize how much informal learning takes place in communal spaces like campus housing, and suggest ways in which formal learning can be integrated into residence halls (such as "inviting faculty and staff to participate in student life activities") (97). In order to assist community college students, professionals working with them must know who they are, collaborate with other professional groups on campus, and think creatively about how to help students succeed.

The final part of this text is "A Closer Look: Specialized Populations and Communities on Two-Year Campuses." This section of the book exemplifies just how varied and complex the community college population truly is. A growing number of older adults are returning to school, especially to community colleges. Some of these "third age" learners are enticed by free tuition, motivated to stay busy and active, interested in an "encore career," or desire to stay connected to a larger community (115-117). The chapter by Fagan and Dunklin on military veterans presents some unsettling statistics, especially regarding female veterans. One such statistic is that while "female veterans have to deal with the residuals of war" like their male counterparts, "23 to 30 percent of female veterans reported military sexual trauma while on active duty" (130). Dimpal Jain's chapter challenges the limited scope of previous research involving Student Involvement Theory by expanding on what "leadership" means among nontraditional students, especially among women-of-color who take on leadership roles in the context of community colleges (145-147). The concluding chapter utilizes Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capital to explore the complex ways in which particular student populations (adult immigrant ESL learners, student athletes, LGBTQ students, and veteran students) may be marginalized within the normative power structure of higher education.

This book sheds light on multiple areas in which America's community colleges are being shaped by the multitude of missions (academic, political, social, economic) continually assigned to them. Administrators, faculty, and professional staff at any institution of higher education as well as city, county, state, and federal officials who are invested in higher education in their locale would do well to read this book to learn how to understand, support, and look closer at

students in their community.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/working-with-students-in-community-colleges-contemporary-strategies-for-bridging-theory-research-and-practice/