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# Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community

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# Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community

## **Abstract**

The article reviews the book "Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community," edited by Gary L. Kramer.

## **Comments**

PERNA, LAURA W. 2009. "Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community." *Journal of Higher Education* 80, no. 2: 238-240.

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## Book Reviews

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*Fostering Student Success in the Campus Community*,  
by G. L. Kramer & Associates. San Francisco, CA:  
John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2007. 460 pp.  
Cloth, \$48.00, ISBN: 1-933371-24-2.

LAURA W. PERNA, University of Pennsylvania

*Fostering student success in the campus community*, edited by Gary Kramer, a professor of counseling psychology and special education at Brigham Young University, provides an impressive collection of insights for campus administrators who are seeking to promote the success of undergraduate students. Reflecting their varied professional positions (e.g., faculty, administrators, college presidents) and institutional affiliations (e.g., liberal arts institutions, research universities, community colleges, research institutes, and policy and technology organizations), the 37 contributors to the book's 20 chapters together offer a comprehensive set of recommendations for improving student success.

The book is organized into four parts with five chapters each. The first part, communicating expectations, includes attention to ways to create a student-centered culture, align students' expectations with institutional characteristics, use data to improve student services and outcomes, and build support for institutional changes that actually, rather than only verbally, "put students first." Part two, connecting services, offers strategies for putting students, rather than institutions, "first" in college admissions practices, using technology to offer a "one-stop" approach to deliver student services and enhance student learning, and designing academic and career advising processes that recognize student development and advising needs. Part three, fostering student development, argues that institutions may encourage student development by promoting learning partnerships between students and student affairs administrators, institutional communities that support students' "search for meaning and purpose," creating organizational structures and leadership processes that promote student success by using out-of-class experiences to promote student development and learning, and encouraging faculty to use advising to engage students outside the classroom. Part four, achieving success, begins by describing institutional strategies for promoting student retention and degree completion, the success of first-year students, and the success of community college students and then offers two concluding and synthesizing chapters.

As might be expected given its length and number of chapters, the volume includes several cross-cutting themes. With the exception of the final two chapters, both by Gary L. Kramer, few chapter authors acknowledge these connections. Nonetheless, the final chapter not only identifies ten themes that cut

across the 20 chapters but also (drawing on earlier chapters) lists specific educational practices that promote student success and provides ten categories of “next steps” for promoting student success.

Student affairs administrators are likely to find this book to be especially useful given the many specific examples and practical recommendations that the authors provide. Most of the chapters include attention to underlying theoretical frameworks guiding their perspectives, reference available research to support their claims and recommendations, and provide examples of how particular institutions have implemented specific strategies to promote student success. Some of the authors provide institutional examples that are based on research, while others draw on their personal experiences. Regardless, the consistent inclusion of institutional exemplars provides a very useful balance to the volume’s goal of providing general insights for encouraging success at all types of colleges and universities.

One key feature of the volume is its approach to defining “student success.” As stated in the preface, “The book makes no attempt to define what student success is or should be for all institutions” (p. xxxiii). Thus, the 20 chapters separately and together offer various definitions of success. Some chapter authors seem to equate “success” with retention. Others argue that retention should be one, but not the only, measure of success. Still others believe that student success should be considered in terms of student development and/or learning. This intentional lack of an overarching definition seems consistent with the volume’s goal of having “each campus community ... define student success” (p. 434). Nonetheless, the absence of an overarching definition of student success may represent a lost opportunity to inform the national dialogue about student success (e.g., building on the papers commissioned as part of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative’s 2006 National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success, <http://nces.ed.gov/npec/symposium.asp>). Given current and future accountability demands (demands that are mentioned by several authors), efforts to broaden the definition of success beyond simple measures of retention and graduation are especially timely and important.

Despite its breadth, the volume leaves some questions unanswered. For example, faculty are one of the intended audiences for the volume and several authors suggest that faculty should become more engaged in practices that promote student learning, development, and retention. However, the volume does not describe how to effectively motivate faculty to engage in these practices.

One of the volume’s strengths is its recognition of the complexities around promoting student success as chapter authors give attention to differences in student development needs and institutions’ commitment to student success as well as changes in the demographic characteristics of college students. Despite this recognition, however, the text seems to argue that by simply “putting students first” and “creating a student-centered culture,” all students will succeed. But the extent to which these approaches effectively promote the success of various groups within the population of “all students” is not clear. Although several authors recognize the growing enrollment of low-income students and the escalating price of attending college, the volume includes virtually no attention either to the ways that students’ financial concerns and resources or their strategies for paying the price of attendance (e.g., working while enrolled) may influence their success or the recommended institutional responses to these issues.

Nonetheless, the volume has much to offer, particularly to student affairs administrators. The volume provides a comprehensive approach to “fostering student success,” including useful insights into the various dimensions of “student success” and specific recommendations and innovative strategies for improving institutional practice. While acknowledging that students play a role in achieving their own success, this volume not only shows that institutions can be doing substantially more to ensure this success but also provides the tools for student affairs administrators to act.

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*New Players, Different Game: Understanding the Rise of For-Profit Colleges and Universities*

by William G. Tierney and Guilbert C. Hentschke.

Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

216 pp. Cloth: \$38.00. ISBN 0801886570.

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“Détente rather than distain” is how William G. Tierney and Guilbert C. Hentschke word the intention of their important contribution to the research literature on for-profit universities. The volume is a welcome addition to the often polemical writing about for-profits that has become particularly heated the past few years with the reauthorizing of the Higher Education Act. Tierney and Hentschke’s work may signal a maturing of the research on for-profit universities in American higher education, and is especially useful in considering the larger public policy ramifications of the rise of the for-profit sector.

The authors start with the intention of comparing ways in which for-profit colleges and universities (FPCU) and traditional colleges and universities (TCU) are alike and different, termed “lumper” or “splitter” approaches. They note the general misunderstanding of FPCUs derived from what they describe as a “clash of cultures” and increasingly direct competition. From the start Tierney and Hentschke concentrate on the larger meaning of the for-profit movement from a public policy perspective. They see the rise of institutions such as the University of Phoenix as marking a shift in public policy that has traditionally relied solely on public and independent institutions as providers of post-secondary education.

Tierney and Hentschke cast a critical eye at the record of innovation in higher education and note (with some exceptions) that change generally occurs within traditional parameters. Conversely, basic assumptions and understandings of higher education, such as the tenure system and shared governance, are challenged by for-profits. The activities of for-profits are more radically innovative than what has been attempted within traditional universities. The authors draw an intriguing parallel between FPCUs and the impact of disruptive technologies on a market in generating new demands from student “customers.”

In the middle section of the book (chapters three, four, and five), Tierney and Hentschke present a great deal of data and analysis drawing a detailed portrait of

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