

**COLLEGE STUDENTS AND  
THEIR ENVIRONMENTS**

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AMERICAN SERIES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS  
PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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# **COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTS**

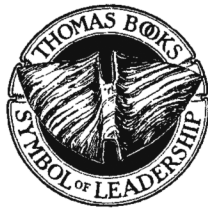
**Understanding the Role Student Affairs Educators  
Play in Shaping Campus Environments**

*Edited by*

**CATHY AKENS, RAQUEL WRIGHT-MAIR,  
& JOSEPH MARTIN STEVENSON**

*Forewords by Naijian Zhang and Samuel D. Museus*

*(With 26 Other Contributors)*



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## FOREWORD

*We shape our buildings, and afterwards, our buildings shape us.*

Winston Churchill

This famous quote can be further interpreted as we student affairs educators shape our college environments, and our college environments shape us. *College Students and Their Environments* is a valuable book that implies the meaning of this quote. This book is purposely written for those who are training to become student affairs educators and those who are newer in the profession. This book not only provides the reader with a theoretical framework, but also some direction on how to create a college environment that is socially just and inclusive. *College Students and Their Environments* is also a valuable synthesis of the essential ideas that student affairs educators need to create an effective and conducive learning environment for college students. With the knowledge, skills, and ideas in this book student affairs educators in-training and new student affairs educators will be able to competently help college students gain unique educational experiences on American college and university campuses in the twenty-first century.

By reading *College Students and Their Environments*, you will better understand the relationship between college environments and student learning and development, and consequently how to create an inclusive learning environment for student success. Additionally, this book is a unique and valuable source for you to develop your professional competency and professional identity.

*College Students and Their Environments* is one of the essential volumes in the *American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity*. The content of this book will assist student affairs educators in addressing their own professional competencies. As the book series does, this book purposely reflects the professional competency areas for student affairs educators set forth by ACPA/NASPA in 2015.

The best value that you as the reader may take from the text is the knowledge, skills, and wisdom offered by the editors and all the chapter authors. These editors and chapter authors have held positions across all lev-

els in student affairs and academic affairs at colleges and universities across the nation. Particularly, the true scientists and practitioners are the book editors, Dr. Cathy Akens, Dr. Raquel Wright-Mair, and Dr. Joseph Martin Stevenson, who have experience in teaching, research, and in administrative positions at the most senior levels in higher education. All three editors are excellent scholars and classroom educators. Therefore, they are more than qualified not only to speak about how to create a college environment that is just and inclusive, but also to identify high qualified chapter authors to share their knowledge, skills, and wisdom on how to make college environments conducive and effective for all students. This team work has resulted in an invaluable product, *College Students and Their Environments* that is now presented to you—the future and new student affairs educators.

The book offers quite a few unique features on how to create a college environment that fosters student learning, growth, development, and supports student success. First, the book approaches the college environment issue from a philosophical foundation and shows the reader what has made student affairs work increasingly complex. By identifying some major shifts of student affairs work in history, the book demonstrates how student affairs service providers became student affairs educators who actively shape the environment instead of being shaped or reactionary.

Second, *College Students and Their Environments* attends to the theories that inform student affairs educators' understanding of campus environments and how campus environments shape college students' developmental processes. The book provides insights and implications on how environmental theories might inform practice and also recommends how to study campus environments. Furthermore, the book clarifies what student success is, explores the primary frameworks used to boost student success, and suggests what student affairs educators should consider when implementing student success initiatives.

Third, *College Students and Their Environments* addresses the intersection of professional competency areas through campus environment cultivation with social justice and inclusion for diverse student populations. To help student affairs educators understand and meet the needs of diverse student populations, the book identifies challenges and strategies and offers recommendations and action for practice. Specifically, the book informs student affairs educators how classroom experiences contribute to students' sense of inclusion on campus.

Finally, to address the professional competencies by ACPA/NASPA in 2015, the book emphasizes the importance of assessment of student needs and success. Particularly, the text provides useful and practical examples of how faculty can work with graduate students in training to conduct an assessment of student needs and success.

*College Students and Their Environments* is a valuable tool which not only examines the future direction of higher education and student affairs, but also provides the reader broad insights into how anticipated changes and emerging issues will impact the direction of those who work on college campuses. It is a book that also prepares emerging student affairs educators and new student affairs educators for the work they will do in shaping campus environments for years to come. This book is an indispensable volume of the *American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity*.

*American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity* is a unique book series that creates an integration of all ten professional competency areas for student affairs educators outlined by the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) in 2015. The series reflects three major themes: professional competencies development, professional identity construction, and case illustrations for theory translation into application. All volumes in the series target graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators. The series blends contemporary theory with current research and empirical support and uses case illustrations to facilitate the readers' ability to translate what they have learned into application and decision making. Each volume focuses on one area of professional competency except the current volume which addresses the intersection of the professional competencies. The series helps graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators develop their professional competencies (ACPA/NASPA) by (1) constructing their personal and ethical foundations; (2) understanding the values, philosophy, and history of student affairs; (3) strengthening their ability in assessment, evaluation, and research; (4) gaining knowledge, skills, and dispositions relating to law, policy, and governance; (5) familiarizing with and learning how to effectively utilize organizational and human resources; (6) learning leadership knowledge and developing leadership skills; (7) understanding oppression, privilege, power, and then learning how to understand social justice and apply it in practice; (8) acquiring student development theories and learning how to use them to inform their practice; (9) familiarizing themselves with technologies and implementing digital means and resources into practice; and (10) gaining advising and supporting knowledge, skills and dispositions. As a result, the series helps graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators foster their professional identity and ultimately achieve their goal of the whole-person education.

Naijian Zhang, Ph.D.  
West Chester University of Pennsylvania



## FOREWORD

**I**t is no secret that the U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse. The students entering the nation's colleges and universities are rapidly diversifying as well. However, most of higher education's professional associations, graduate programs that prepare future college educators, and college campuses were not created to serve the increasing numbers of students from historically marginalized backgrounds, identities, and communities. This incongruence creates significant challenges for professionals entering higher education and student affairs. Specifically, most college educators are pressured—or forced—to conform to conditions that are not conducive to supporting diverse populations, while simultaneously asked to help these groups thrive.

Given the aforementioned realities, it is incumbent upon us, as student affairs educators, to collectively understand how to prepare the next generation of higher education and student affairs professionals to navigate these complexities. It is also appropriate to say that it is undeniably urgent that we generate such collective understanding, because doing so is necessary for us to ensure that all students have the opportunity to thrive in postsecondary education and achieve their full potential.

There are several indicators of hope—signs that we are more equipped today than we have ever been to prepare college educators to effectively work with these increasingly diverse student populations. For example, compared to any time in our nation's history, marginalized and minoritized communities are more represented among faculty, administrators, staff, and students on college campuses. In addition, higher education scholars have been conducting research on these populations for decades, and practitioners have been developing practical knowledge about how to effectively serve these students during this time as well. As a result, we collectively know more than ever before about how to construct environments (e.g., cultures and structures) that allow these populations to thrive in college.

The current volume is one manifestation of the aforementioned progress. Its diverse cadre of authors covers a wide range of topics relevant to campus environments and serving increasingly diverse college student pop-

ulations. In the opening chapter, the authors chart the history of student affairs, underscoring the ways in which the role of student affairs professionals has evolved into that of critical educators who shape students' identities, experiences, and outcomes in profound ways. In doing so, the authors blur the lines between the classroom and larger campus, highlighting the need to think about campus environments broadly in conversations about effectively serving diverse students. The bulk of the book's chapters provide in-depth discussions of (a) the needs of today's diverse student populations, (b) ways in which educators can—and sometimes do—create environments that positively shape these students' experiences in and out of the classroom, and (c) strategies that educators working in graduate preparation programs can use to more effectively prepare student affairs professionals to achieve these goals.

Clearly, this volume makes an invaluable contribution to existing discourse in higher education. Rather than treating diversity and inclusion as add-on values or obligations—an approach that often results in their marginalization relative to more mainstream priorities (e.g., the quest for prestige and resources)—the chapters in this volume integrate an understanding of diverse student populations into discussions about constructing fundamental mainstream environments, spaces, and processes on college campuses. This integration of critical consciousness and cultural relevance throughout the design and delivery of education is exactly what we need if we are to see progress in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education. Indeed, the demographic makeup of the authors and their approach to conceptualizing educational environments and experiences are symbols of our current collective potential to re-envision a new system of higher education that is more diverse, more inclusive, more equitable, more relevant—more just.

But, if it is true that we are more representationally and intellectually equipped to create conditions that allow diverse populations to thrive within higher education, it is reasonable to ask the question, *why* has our post-secondary education system continued to perpetuate so many social inequities? What is missing from the efforts to create institutions and environments that effectively serve diverse populations? And, what are the barriers that will prevent college educators from applying the knowledge that is shared in the chapters in this volume?

Over the last decade, my research team has worked with thousands of people across over 100 campuses throughout the nation in order to support them in their efforts to advance inclusion and equity. We have gathered and analyzed data from over 1,000 interviewees and tens of thousands of survey participants—including administrators, faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students—through research and assessment projects at colleges and



universities across the country. Through these processes, we have gained some insight into these existing barriers and outlined a few of the most salient of them herein. The goal is to prompt readers to think about how they might more effectively advocate and implement some of the ideas and recommendations in the chapters that follow. It is important to note that the barriers that have been included in our work are not characteristic of all institutions, leaders, or educators, but rather represent formidable barriers that we have seen existing and unaddressed on many campuses across the nation.

The first barrier that appears to be pervasive is the common *absence of courageous leadership*. Despite the fact that we have increasing levels of knowledge about how to construct educational environments that are fair and designed for everyone, most institutional leaders refuse to invest sufficient resources necessary to transform education systems and make them more equitable. Most leaders reject the reality that they must divert some energy and resources from the goals that perpetuate systems of inequality—objectives such as the never-ending quest for prestige that consumes so much of the resources that run through our institutions—to those that advance it. College and university leaders must face the reality that they must choose the moral imperative of investing in equity, which requires sacrifices, or acknowledge that they will reinforce the status quo.

The second barrier that we have observed is related to college educators who are on the ground working with diverse student populations themselves. Although there are champions of diversity and equity on campuses across the country, these persons are often in the minority and marginalized within their institutions. At the same time, the majority working within our colleges and universities continues to go about business as usual and is characterized by a *refusal to engage in the deep personal transformation* necessary for them to adapt to the increasingly complex students and communities whom they are charged with serving. Most of us were trained in a system that was ill-equipped to teach us how to construct learning environments within which all students can thrive regardless of their backgrounds and identities. As a result, personal transformation is not only helpful but absolutely necessary for us to develop the capacity to effectively create such environments.

The third and final barrier that has become increasingly apparent for its ability to dissolve efforts to advance diversity, inclusion, and equity on college campuses is situated at the intersection of institutional leaders and college educators. Specifically, most college and university campuses *lack the campus cultures and structures needed to promote and sustain equity agendas*. Within higher education, everywhere you look, there are pervasive manifestations of cultures that inhibit equity agendas. Culturally, institutions unapologetically prioritize values of money and prestige over the moral values of diver-

sity and equity on a daily basis and continuously in their decision-making processes. In addition, college and university campuses invest substantial amounts of energy in boosting their image as institutions that provide a “high-quality” and “internationally recognized” educational experience, leading to a culture in which dissent is feared and eradicated immediately when it emerges, rather than their becoming enthusiastically and productively engaged as an opportunity to improve their organization’s capacity to fulfill its democratic and moral obligations.

Structurally, support and reward systems are designed in ways that allow educators who perpetuate the status quo to survive and thrive in higher education. Professional development opportunities, teaching evaluations, internal grants competitions, annual review systems, and promotion and tenure requirements are just a few examples of support and reward systems that drive behavior on college campuses but rarely require educators to ensure that an understanding of diverse communities or equity agenda is embedded within their professional development and work—and sometimes even punish educators for doing so. To overcome this barrier, institutional leaders and educators must work together to create structures that center and sustain equity agendas.

In sum, it is absolutely essential for institutional leaders and educators to make the sacrifices necessary to deconstruct systems, redistribute resources, challenge their pre-existing values and perspectives, and reconstruct environments so that they can effectively serve those who have historically been left out of the mainstream. Such commitments are also necessary to effectively enact the critical ideas that are outlined in the current collection of chapters. In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King underscored our nation’s inability to address the most significant social problems of the time despite its unprecedented scientific genius. He called for a radical revolution of values that shifted the nation’s priorities from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented one. And, he called on us to cultivate our moral genius so that we might live in a more just world. This call must be reinforced today, and responding to it is critical to breaking down the aforementioned barriers to advancing equity and creating institutions in which all students can thrive in higher education.

Samuel D. Museus, Ph.D.

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We applaud those who are working daily to create inclusive and engaging environments for all students coming to college. We are particularly grateful to our colleagues, the chapter authors, who contributed their research and passion to this book. We thank Coretta Roseboro Walker who provided technical, editorial, and logistical support throughout this process, and Patricia Corwin, whose editorial assistance was invaluable.

Working on this book together is an outcome of intentional teaching, learning, and mentorship. The editors reflect three generations of that process, with Joseph Stevenson having taught Cathy Akens in her doctoral program, and Cathy Akens having taught Raquel Wright-Mair in her master's program. Our continued connections, camaraderie, and professional engagement fueled us to explore a common passion we share—the notion that we as educators have a responsibility to learn about, understand, and create environments that best support success for all students.

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**COLLEGE STUDENTS AND  
THEIR ENVIRONMENTS**





## Chapter 1

# THE ROLE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS EDUCATORS IN SHAPING COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS: THE HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND VALUES OF OUR PROFESSION

*Florence M. Guido, Courtney E. Matsumoto, and Gabrielle A. McAllaster*

The role of student affairs educators in shaping college and university environments began when, in the second half of the nineteenth century, U.S. faculty adopted the German research university model and student enrollments slowly increased because of an expanding U.S. higher education system (Thelin & Gasman, 2017). Around the same time, concern for larger numbers of women enrolled in higher education prompted the hiring of female administrators to oversee their well-being. Soon thereafter, in the 1890s, the first dean of women and the first dean of men made their appearance on campus at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, respectively (Schwartz & Stewart, 2017).

Since then, this important role for those in student affairs has journeyed from its beginnings as caretaker, disciplinarian, and campus policy enforcer to active educator in the academy more than a century later. In the decades that followed the advent of student affairs professionals' arrival as guardians of *in loco parentis* (i.e., in place of the parent) in the academy, they have shifted their mission, as students and the institutions they attended changed focus, too. In effect, student affairs professionals are shape shifters, always operating in a higher education environment, yet changing form over time to adapt to student, institutional, and societal needs.

This chapter lays the foundation for the detailed discussions that follow in this book on how student affairs educators shape college and university environments. First, the shifting philosophy and values of student affairs educators in shaping students' environments are traced to create an informed

understanding of the past in order to minimize mishaps when shaping the unknown future of the profession. Next, the historical role of the student affairs profession sets the context and creates understanding of the eventual fluctuating status of the profession over time and its role in fashioning college and university environments. Third, a discussion of the shift from service providers to educators documents the convergence of circumstances that created this change. The transformation of roles for the student affairs educator from dichotomous in-class versus out-of-class silos to integration of the campus learning environment is highlighted. Fourth, student affairs educators as accepted partners in the academic enterprise is reviewed and critiqued. Finally, application of these concepts to practice, recommendations for the future, and reflective questions to consider are presented.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings of the Student Affairs Profession**

The philosophical heritage of the student affairs profession is reflected in practice through educational documents produced from the first half of the twentieth century to the present. Several historians have marked the *Yale Report of 1828*, grounded in rationalism, as the first formal U.S. higher education philosophical statement (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). Written by Yale faculty, it reinforced the notion of a traditional classical curriculum based primarily on “discipline of the mind” (Brubacher, 1982). Eventually, after the Civil War, this statement was rebuked as higher education and the diversity of its rapidly increasing students expanded and other significant changes were made to the curriculum offerings. Such changes included more practical courses of study (e.g., addition of agricultural and mechanical colleges), a pragmatic approach, and electives (begun by Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard, in 1872), comprising one of the earliest signs of what would become a postmodern approach. One of the most recent student affairs documents, *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), discussed later in the chapter, reflects a postmodern philosophy putting the whole student and student learning ahead of teaching.

Dozens of educational philosophies have played out in U.S. higher education and student affairs since its inception. Many professionals need more than methods for problem solving in this environment, because “only by studying and applying underlying premises and deeply held assumptions can a practitioner of student affairs hope to bring insight to a novel problem, a ‘different’ student, a new situation” (Carpenter, 2011, p. 8). Selected pertinent philosophies are highlighted below, which offer explanations of how they have and can apply to student affairs professionals’ role in shaping college environments.

***Rationalism: Absolutes and Great Truths***

Rationalism, one of the oldest philosophical traditions in the Western world, focuses on intellect and free will as that which separates us from other living organisms. Rationalists assume ideas are absolute and the writings of classical philosophers (e.g., Aristotle and Plato) contain the Truths and Ideas an educated person needs to know (Knock, 1988). More prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century than in the beginning of the twenty-first, college student affairs was singularly focused on and “shaped practices which are primarily concerned with creating and controlling a campus environment in order that students will develop intellectually” (Knock, 1988, p. 11). Thus, student affairs policies and practices, such as selective admissions and documentation of conduct wrongdoings, are congruent with rationalism. Any student service not supporting a student’s intellectual development, such as student activities and career services, may be available but is not considered essential in the institution. The legal concept of *in loco parentis* fits well with a rationalist philosophical perspective. Although elements of rationalism are linked to the university today, most student affairs professionals are more likely to support the development of the whole student, making a focus only on this earlier perspective limited. Some Ivy League institutions lean heavily in this rationalistic direction in that these institutions’ missions and practices focus almost exclusively on students’ academic achievements.

***Pragmatism: Learning by Doing***

Much in concert with the notion of serving the whole student, pragmatism, unlike rationalism, frames reality as the “sum total of human experience” (Carpenter, Dean, & Haber-Curran, 2016, p. 10) and “rejects the idea of permanent, unchanging truth” (Knock, 1988, p. 11). Philosopher John Dewey, a quintessential pragmatist with a lasting influence on all levels of education (McDermott, 1981), was a champion of “learning by doing.” He believed, like other pragmatists, that “experience is the real test of all things” (Butler, 1968, p. 377). As a result, pragmatic education puts the learner at the center, but what is experienced must be reflected on and reconstructed in order for learning to occur (Young, 2003). Cowley (1936/1994a) credited student affairs professionals with introducing pragmatism to faculty who favored rationalism and a strong singular focus on students’ intellect. The seminal 1937 and 1949 *Student Personnel Point of View* documents both reflect a pragmatic philosophy of the field. In student affairs today, the legacy of pragmatism includes those student experiences that also provide students an opportunity to think about what their experience means. For example, service learning opportunities, where students can learn in the real world and

are supervised by those who facilitate learning and do not treat students as knowledge receptacles, have roots in pragmatism. Any college environment created to allow students to learn what interests them, in or out of class, has similar philosophical origins.

### ***Postmodernism: Experience Inseparable from Power***

Popular in the twentieth century, postmodernism is a philosophical umbrella that can be applied to existentialism; phenomenology; structuralism, deconstruction, and reconstruction; poststructuralism; intersectionality; postcolonialism; and queer theory (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016; Young, 2003), to name a few. In some ways, these philosophies differ dramatically from each other, but each unwaveringly questions modernism's assumptions about conventional forms of thinking and objectivity. Postmodernist thinkers, like pragmatists, keep the human context at the center and frame the individual human experience as incapable of separation from social power. In addition, postmodernists believe everything is subjective, which rationalists find abhorrent and wherein many minoritized groups feel they have a philosophical home. Postmodernism highlights "socially constructed education (over societal systems of education), lifelong learning (over time-bound classes), informal experiences (over formal ones), and multicultural education (over melting-pot education)" (Young, 2003, p. 95). Moreover, valuing learning over teaching, postmodernists generally place responsibility for learning on students, leaving faculty and student affairs professionals in a facilitator role.

In student affairs today, postmodernism, often devoid of deconstruction and reconstruction, is found within and between institutions. For example, the organizational structure of student affairs and the functional areas linked to a larger student affairs division can be connected to a business affairs division (e.g., residence life), or even at some institutions, tied to an academic affairs division (e.g., academic and career advisors within a major). From institution to institution, the variability is great. Fracturing of this kind within a large institution of higher education can make it difficult to serve students individually when the goal is to allow them freedom to chart their own learning and growth path. That said, it is necessary for student affairs professionals to integrate many perspectives in order to expand their own and students' worldviews. Environments most appropriate for minoritized students, including ways these may differ from dominant culture environments, need scrutiny, deconstruction, and thoughtful reconstruction if higher education is to succeed in welcoming all students to campus.

**Intersectionality.** Rooted in a critical worldview and postmodern by nature, *intersectionality* is a kind of deconstruction that allows individuals to