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Book Review

Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership: Strategies and Competencies for Success, by Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy and Shannon E. Ellis (Eds.). Washington, DC: NASPA, 2011, ISBN: 978-0-931654-50-3, 344 pp. $39.95, hardcover.

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Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy is the executive director of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) since 1995, and Shannon E. Ellis has been the vice president for student services at the University of Nevada, Reno, since 1998. With their combined experience of over 60 years in higher education, their book provides readers and senior student affairs officers a guide to "break out of their self-imposed boundaries and demonstrate that they are collegewide and community leaders" (Dungy & Ellis, 2011, p. xiii).

The last several years have yielded countless conversations and arguments about the changing higher education landscape and the need for increased institutional accountability over student success. This mounting concern over improving student outcomes, gainful employment data, and/or progressive enrollment in graduate degree programs has reached an apex and remains a point of contention between higher education leaders and congressional bodies. One way to address these issues is to encourage effective and qualified leaders to take their place in the upper echelon of the college administrations, ultimately affecting a campuswide cultural shift toward improving student success outcomes.

It is in this context that Gwendolyn Jordan Dungy and Shannon E. Ellis's book enters the conversation. In their book, *Exceptional Senior Student Affairs Administrators' Leadership: Strategies and Competencies for Success*, Dungy and Ellis have brought together a collection of experiences and tips for college officials who aspire to be transformative leaders. The book's message is necessary, especially in an age where the student affairs department is becoming more responsible for student development and beginning to exert a greater presence in students' lives, starting with participation in summer bridge and transitional programs, to tutoring and advising services for current students, and through to graduation and alumni services. This changing presence confirms the already widely held belief that student development is a holistic experience and requires the campuswide involvement of the student in both academic and social circles. The book contends that it is from this leadership and experience in student support backgrounds that senior student affairs officers are extremely well-equipped to lead the institution into the future, creating enduring student development and student success outcomes.

The book begins with a discussion of the world of student affairs and the ever-changing landscape that is higher education. The ensuing chapters outline common traits among effective student affairs leaders as well as characteristics that can help those leaders motivate staff and institutions to achieve student success goals. Additional comments by Cynthia Cherrey and Kathleen Allen, contributing authors in the book, outline the importance of creating partnerships among all

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departments and individuals that interact with students. Cherrey and Allen (2011) mention, "the more people who are intentionally nudging a networked system (such as a campus culture, retention strategies, or student development) in the same direction, the more we can influence the direction of the network and the outcome" (p. 43). It is this fostering of community relations and a desire for unifying the entire college or university under one mission and vision that make transformative leaders a vital element in order to shift a campus's culture, thereby improving the outcomes of the students.

In addition to the theme of transformative leadership, the book outlines the importance of breaking down walls and eliminating the functional silos that are present at many large institutions. In addition, the book explains that leaders who can make this change possible can be found anywhere on a college campus. This text also thoroughly examines how student service leaders can achieve their potential as leaders of their departments, and of the institution as a whole.

While there is a plethora of information about the values, motivations, and characteristics that institutional leaders need to have, I believe the book only skims the surface regarding leadership at distance education programs. As technology and online/hybrid institutions become a commonality in higher education, the book falls short of including a needed perspective on how to create and develop effective leaders in those types of educational settings. Online education has proven itself to be a popular options for students, and the emergence of massive open online courses are only forcing the hands of traditional institutions, making them reassess their role in providing online programs. Effective and transformative leaders at online institutions also need assistance and guidance on how to best serve students, peers, and other administrators in order to achieve their respective student success outcomes in this unique educational setting. The book discusses all types of traditional institutions (public, private, community colleges, etc.) and guides leaders in those environments accordingly. Navigating and leading those complex hierarchical institutions, sometimes with offices spread throughout the country, should be explored more thoroughly. All higher education leaders deal with complex organizations. However, in addition to dealing with the budget allocations and desire to increase profits, which are common throughout higher education, leaders at online institutions need to contend with diverse, nontraditional students to a much greater extent than their traditional counterparts. An understanding of providing supportive services, effective student engagement, and nonacademic programs in which students can develop is needed in order for leaders in those settings to help calm the voices that are calling for greater federal and state involvement in the operation of U.S. higher education institutions.

Ultimately, this is an excellent book that discusses the need for effective and transformative leaders across the entire higher education sector. As online and nontraditional institutions grow in number, further altering the status quo of higher education, greater information will need to be included that can address necessary skills, informing administrators and other leaders on how to locate and guide them to experiences and competencies that will be needed for a successful college/university president, no matter what the institutional setting.

References

Cherrey, C., & Allen, K. E. (2011). Student affairs leadership in a networked knowledge era. In G. J. Dungy & S. E. Ellis (Eds.), *Exceptional senior student affairs administrators' leadership: Strategies and competencies for success* (pp. 41–58). Washington, DC: NASPA.

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The *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* provides a forum for studies and dialogue that allows readers to better develop social change in the field of education and learning. Journal content may focus on educational issues of all ages and in all settings. It also presents peer-reviewed commentaries, book reviews, interviews of prominent individuals, and additional content. The objectives: We publish research and related content that examines current relevant educational issues and processes aimed at presenting readers with knowledge and showing how that knowledge can be used to impact social change in educational or learning environments. Additional content provides an opportunity for scholarly and professional dialogue regarding that content's usefulness in expanding the body of scholarly knowledge and increasing readers' effectiveness as educators. The journal also focuses on facilitating the activities of both researcher-practitioners and practitioner-researchers, providing optimal opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative thought through blogging and other communications.

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