

EDITOR'S NOTES

The genesis of the idea for this volume began as I served as the senior vice president and provost of Virginia Tech through the 1990s. I had been pondering questions about student intellectual growth over the past twenty years as I held various administrative roles in universities. Each of these institutions had major or minor plans to focus on the education of the whole person, and some actually had identified what a college education was all about by determining general student learning outcomes. But measurement of these outcomes was always a major stumbling block, and so the plans went on a shelf to be produced when the next crisis came from the higher education oversight committee, an accrediting agency, or some legislator demanding greater accountability from the institution.

The seriousness of seeking answers for the intellectual growth of students hit when I realized that as provost, I had responsibility for a major academic enterprise with thousands of undergraduate and graduate students, their academic programs, and their progress toward degrees. This reality brought the focus of my attention in 1993 back to student learning outcomes. At the same time, public cries for accountability from higher education were again building in state legislatures around the country, including in Virginia. Our response had been to require academic departments to produce five-year plans displaying their students' progress from recruitment to graduation and professional careers. A review of most of those plans revealed perfunctory responses to superficial and simplistic questions, with little attention given to identifying and measuring intellectual growth. The intellectual growth of students was clearly not a central focus for academic work but rather was attended to when a report was called for and produced to verify the task was done.

Given that faculty are usually prepared only in their subject matter, with little knowledge or experience with theoretical or pedagogical frameworks for understanding learning in its broadest sense, it is not hard to see why progress has been slow in obtaining consensus on student learning outcomes or measurement issues. What seems to be missing for most institutions and most faculties is a theoretical framework for understanding what is happening as learning takes place and the supports needed to advance this learning. This volume seeks to fill this void with one theoretical framework and examples of its use in student engagement and discovery.

I was introduced to the theory of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) when I returned to my faculty role in 2001 and worked with colleagues to

produce a research grant funded by the National Science Foundation exploring how girls make information technology career decisions using the theoretical framework of self-authorship. This framework was ideal to foster understanding of a student's ways of making meaning of complex decisions, including career decisions.

This volume is a direct result of further collaborations with colleagues as applications of the theory have resulted in development of assessment measures, innovative curricular programs, and research to answer important student learning outcome questions. A symposium presentation at the American Education Research Association in 2005 brought the chapter authors together, and the idea of sharing our findings with a larger audience was born.

A major contribution of this volume is to expose college faculty, student personnel faculty and staff, and college administrators to the theoretical framework of self-authorship and its link to addressing student learning outcomes. The illustrations of the intellectual development of students as they make their journey toward self-authorship with multiple examples of the Learning Partnerships Model (LPM) provide real-life stories to guide educational practice. First identified by Kegan (1994) and further developed by Baxter Magolda (2001), the promise of this framework is explained in Chapter One as the LPM is described alongside an overview of the literature documenting current attempts to identify student learning outcomes in higher education. Chapter Two provides new benchmarks for student learning outcomes and identifies the challenges that higher education institutions face when they embrace changing old paradigms for teaching, learning, and measurement of outcomes. The authors of Chapters Three, Four, and Five explore applications of self-authorship and describe the development and use of assessment instruments and applications for research and curriculum development. Chapter Six sums up the promise of self-authorship and challenges readers to reenvision their educational practice, and Chapter Seven suggests next steps on the journey to using self-authorship as a framework for substantial change and improvement.

The audiences for this volume are broad, ranging from college faculty to student affairs faculty and staff and college administrators facing assessment challenges for reporting student learning outcomes to their various constituencies, agencies, and boards. This volume should also prove instructive to faculty embarking on curriculum revisions and identifying and measuring student learning outcomes for undergraduate and graduate students.

Challenge and support are key concepts in producing self-authored young people. Throughout this volume, the challenge of producing work that will influence substantial educational practice change is evident. The support the chapter authors offered one another through the production of this volume and our ongoing efforts of collaboration sustain our passion and belief in this framework. We hope that this volume will not only be read but

also will be used as a guide as learning outcomes are structured and educational practice is envisioned that will truly advance the intellectual growth of all students everywhere.

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Editor

References

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