

EDITOR'S NOTES

Over the years, many of us who work in small colleges have bemoaned the absence of our institutions and our experiences from the student affairs literature, from preparation program curricula and numerous resources provided by our national associations. Many people of goodwill and limited time (including me) have threatened to sit down and write a book that will begin to fill the considerable gap in the literature. I am glad that the New Directions in Student Services series editors, John Schuh and Elizabeth Whitt, invited me to edit a volume on the small college dean, thereby saving me from following through on my threat. Happily, I was able to convince a handful of bright and insightful colleagues that writing a chapter for this volume was noble and feasible and would be a lot of fun. I will leave it to them to respond to the question of whether writing and contributing their chapters was any of these things. I can only say that I enjoyed every minute of my collaboration with them and hope that they are satisfied with the final volume and their part in it.

This volume and its authors have three important goals. First, we seek to provide a focus on the work of senior student affairs officers in small colleges. Many such people labor well and faithfully in obscurity. We seek to shine a light on the realities of being a dean at a small college. Second, we hope to provide useful information to those who are interested in working in a small college environment. Small colleges are those with 5,000 or fewer students, and we know that the work of deans in these settings differs from the work of deans in larger institutions. Think of this volume as a primer on being a small college dean. We have tried to anticipate the most obvious questions about this work and provide perspectives born of experience. Finally, we hope that this volume may spur more research on the experience of student affairs professionals in small college settings. This volume is not a research report, but our hope is that enterprising researchers will pursue their efforts in the area of small colleges and student affairs work in those settings.

In developing the idea for this volume on the small college dean, I consulted with colleagues about what should be included in it. Joan Claar, former dean of students at DePauw University and Cornell College, and I had developed an outline for a book on small colleges in the mid-1990s. This early collaboration led substantively to the content for this volume. I was not able to persuade her to contribute to this volume, though; retirement and grandchildren are fierce competitors when it comes to asking for time. Even so, her conceptual contributions are worth noting.

Chapter One charts the territory of both small colleges and the work of the dean. It provides historical context and a current picture of small colleges, their vast diversity, their role in higher education, and the work of the dean. It seeks to answer the question, “Why a volume on the small college dean?”

Chapter Two by Debbie Heida provides a description of the small college dean’s portfolio. It addresses the array of functional areas that can fall under the purview of the dean, illustrates how divisions of student affairs can be organized in small colleges, and identifies institutional and societal factors that affect the organization of student affairs work in small colleges.

Douglas Oblander addresses the realities of staffing a small college student affairs division in Chapter Three. He describes the challenges of and provides strategies for recruiting and retaining staff, and provides a helpful perspective on the nature of work in small colleges. His attention to the needs and challenges of early- and mid-career colleagues is especially valuable.

In Chapter Four, Janet Heeter Bass defines the differences between the dean’s role and the vice president’s role. She provides her own insights, along with those of colleagues at similar institutions, and gives concrete examples of how the work of each role is manifested. Her writing puts the reader in the moment as she navigates both roles.

Bruce Colwell, in Chapter Five on the relationship between academic affairs and student affairs, provides a comprehensive look at the historical, structural, and political factors affecting this essential partnership. He sets out the relevant historical context as well as current and potential models for good collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs on small college campuses.

In the final chapter, William Flanagan carefully considers the future of the small college dean. His long years of experience provide important insights into and specificities in identifying factors that will be most salient for small college deans in the next ten years.

My wish is that one of the fine higher education and student affairs graduate programs that prepare so many new practitioners will develop special expertise in small colleges and attract faculty and graduate students who are interested in doing research in the area. Canisius College offers a college student personnel program that highlights private college settings. Classes on small colleges are occasionally offered in a variety of graduate programs, and this is also good news. At the end of the day, though, my hope (and that of many other colleagues who work at small colleges) is that the faculty who produce so much of the literature of higher education and student affairs will focus more directly on the work of student affairs practitioners in small college settings. Until then, I hope that readers find this volume to be informative and thought provoking. I especially hope that student affairs colleagues in small colleges see themselves and their experiences reflected realistically.

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Sarah B. Westfall
Editor

SARAH B. WESTFALL is vice president for student development and dean of students at Kalamazoo College in Michigan.