

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Today's college student population is diverse, complex, and ever-changing. With more than fourteen million undergraduate students enrolled in the nation's two- and four-year colleges and universities (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005), higher education faces numerous challenges and issues in serving a diverse population. It is estimated that by 2015 the number of undergraduates will increase to sixteen million. With each generation of college students, these individuals have brought with them their life experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Together, these experiences have shaped the culture among college students and have made each generation a distinctive group of individuals. Factors including social, political, personal, and technological have influenced the way in which college students viewed themselves, the college experience, and the world they live in.

In the last decade a lot has been written about the different generations of college students. The two major generations that have been written about or studied are the "Baby Boomers" and the "Generation X" students. The "Baby Boomers" are defined as the generation that grew up with the space race, the civil rights movements, Vietnam, and Watergate. The "Generation X" followed the "Baby Boomers" and witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, the AIDS epidemic, and the creation of the Web phenomenon (Oblinger, 2003). Since then, the landscape of today's college students has changed dramatically. Unlike previous generations, the twenty-first-century college student is heavily influenced by information technology. A major contributor to the rise of this growth is the arrival on campus of students born between 1982 and 2003—a group called the "Millennial generation" (Keeling, 2003; Oblinger, 2003). Unlike their predecessors, "Gen-X" students, the Millennial students possess different characteristics—they "gravitate toward group activity; identify with their parents' values and feel close to their parents; spend more time doing homework and housework and less time watching TV; believe 'it's cool to be smart;' are fascinated by new technologies; are racially and ethnically diverse; and often have at least one immigrant parent" (Oblinger, 2003, p. 38). In addition, the increase among older adults pursuing postsecondary education has become a national trend. With the increasing emphasis on globalization in society and the workplace, individuals are seeking academic credentials to certify them for high-skill, high-tech positions in the world of work.

The changing landscape of students enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities is a result of different factors. According to Carnevale and Fry (2000), the growth of undergraduate enrollment is attributed to five

possible factors: a rise in birth rates between 1982 and 1996, immigration, pressures on older workers to add to their skills, better academic preparation among high school students, and changing characteristics of families. These factors, taken together, introduce a complex dynamic for professionals seeking to meet the academic, personal, social, and intellectual needs of today's college students.

In terms of demographic trends, recent data show that minorities will make up much of the new growth in undergraduate populations. In fact, an estimated 80 percent of the 2.6 million new students expected by 2015 will be from ethnic minorities (Carnevale and Fry, 2000). Carnevale and Fry pay particular attention to the growth among Hispanics in the United States, both in terms of population and their participation in the K-12 and postsecondary sectors. The authors maintain that Hispanic undergraduates will account for about one in six undergraduates on campus by 2015. As a result, Hispanics will be the country's largest college-going minority population. This phenomenon and demographic trend has significant implications for higher education broadly.

Understanding students in transition is not an easy task. It requires that we have an understanding of what students bring to the college experience; that is, prior academic preparation or training, life experiences, and cultural experiences. Holistically, these experiences serve as a set of characteristics and events that will influence not only how these students perceive college but also what their ability is to navigate the college environment. Given the rich characteristics of today's college students, student services professionals are faced with growing challenges in the types of services and programs they provide in the areas of social, academic, and personal adjustment. The ability to provide effective services to students is directly related to understanding how these individuals were socialized prior to their arrival to college—be it in their prior learning environment (high school, community college, and so on), home, social context, or cultural context. In addition, all educational institutions are not the same in terms of structural characteristics, size, traditions, student characteristics, location, and culture. As a result, the converging of the two worlds can create a high level of anxiety and stress, as well as significant challenges, for students during their transition process to the new environment.

Although the current emphasis today has been to think about the Millennial student, it is important to acknowledge that the twenty-first-century college student may be a “Gen-X” student who has expectations of customer service, a “Baby Boomer” who is participating in higher education via distance education or e-learning, or a “Millennial student” who exhibits distinct learning styles and favors teamwork, experiential activities, structure, and technology. No matter the generation a student may be a member of, given his or her chronological age, the fact is that higher education administrators, faculty, staff, and student affairs professionals must rethink

their procedures and services if they are to successfully meet the expectations of their complex student body.

This issue of *New Directions for Student Services* provides an overview of the many issues facing today's college students with respect to the transition process, from how college is portrayed in the mainstream media of television to understanding the needs of transfer students. Ensuring the success of students depends on many factors on a college or university campus. Each institution has a unique cultural context that will influence the daily practices and procedures that are implemented.

In Chapter One, Mary Stuart Hunter traces the evolution of the First-Year Experience movement, which began in the late 1970s. Hunter explores how the lessons learned about improving the first-year experience for students can be applied to a broader context in higher education. Specifically, she describes the characteristics of efforts that enhance the first-year experience, including the importance of understanding students, changing cultures, faculty and staff development initiatives, and the nature of teaching and learning. Acknowledging that educational institutions have different cultures and political climates, Hunter concludes by articulating strategies for reform.

In Chapter Two, Barbara Tobolowsky introduces us to how college is represented in popular culture. She explores the role of the prime-time portrait of the transition from high school to college in terms of academic, social, and personal issues, drawing examples from the series and episodes of *Boy Meets World*, *Felicity*, *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch*, *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*, *Moesha*, *The Parkers*, and *7th Heaven*. In her descriptions, she addresses how these portraits influence new entering college students' perceptions of the college and how some of these portraits perpetuate stereotypes about college experience.

In Chapter Three, Jennifer Keup addresses the issue of promoting new-student success and the importance of assessing academic development and achievement among first-year students. She draws data from both the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) annual Freshman Survey and the Your First College Year (YFCY) survey. The benefit of using both surveys is the ability to have longitudinal data for students one year out. The sample includes more than nineteen thousand students at 115 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities. In her analysis, Keup provides a picture of the academic and intellectual development of first-year students during the critical period of their adjustment. She concludes the chapter by addressing implications for faculty, academic advisors, and staff about ways to enhance students' perceptions of their cognitive development as well as to empower students to pursue quality levels of engagement and participation during their first year in college.

In Chapter Four, Jaime Lester describes the population and demographic projections for higher education in the United States, with a focus

on the Hispanic population. She uses California as a backdrop to investigate the transition of students from community colleges to four-year institutions. For ethnic minorities, community colleges are the schools of choice to begin their postsecondary education. In California, the transfer function has played a critical role in facilitating the movement of students from the two- to four-year college or university. Lester describes two programs that focus on providing transitional services and offers suggestions for institutions and student affairs professionals.

In Chapter Five, Soko Starobin acquaints us with the issues facing international students in U.S. colleges and universities. She begins by presenting a demographic profile of international student enrollment in the United States from 2001 to 2004 by student place of origin during three different time periods. Starobin discusses changes in policy and regulations affecting international students in relation to the growing concern about national security since September 11, particularly the implementation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and its implications for higher education. Within the context of racial and ethnic conflict around the world, the author identifies some of the challenges for student services to help foster a welcoming academic environment for international students and visiting scholars. She concludes the chapter with recommendations to academic leaders, faculty, and student services practitioners for developing and implementing programs to enhance U.S. students' understanding of international affairs in a global society.

In Chapter Six, Jonathan Compton, Elizabeth Cox, and Frankie Santos Laanan introduce readers to a growing student population in higher education—adult learners. The authors differentiate the terms *adult learners* and *nontraditional students* and provide national statistics of the characteristics and enrollment trends of adult and nontraditional students. In addition to reviewing the literature, the authors highlight exemplary programs at two- and four-year institutions that are successful in serving adult learners. Specifically, the eight principles of effective service to adult learners developed by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) are presented. Using these principles, the authors provide examples of how six institutions have implemented successful services to these students. The authors conclude by discussing the implications of adults as students and their transitions as employees, parents, and students.

In Chapter Seven, Steven Aragon and Mario Rios Perez discuss the role of community colleges in serving diverse populations and how the transfer function benefits students of color. They provide an overview of the barriers to transfer and highlight some of the findings in the literature about transfer shock, transfer process, and transfer student recruitment. The authors profile a program at a research-extensive university in the Midwest called the Academic Year Research Experience (AYRE). One of the goals of the AYRE program is to facilitate the transition of freshmen and sophomore students in becoming actively engaged in research at the university. Details

about the program, including eligibility, format, and benefits, are presented, with a specific emphasis on the benefits to transfer students.

In the final chapter, John Schuh and Frankie Santos Laanan discuss the impact of natural disasters on colleges and universities. Specifically, the authors discuss the concept of forced transitions and what this means for higher education institutions and students directly affected by unexpected natural disasters. Using the recent disaster of Hurricane Katrina, the authors provide a hypothetical situation about one student who may have been affected by the disaster. The goal of this chapter is to bring to the forefront some of the dilemmas, challenges, and implications for numerous stakeholders, including higher education leaders, administrators, faculty, and student services professionals, when faced with the needs of students during this traumatic event. There is no doubt that the colleges and universities in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida are still grappling with the results of this disaster and that it will be many years before we as a society can understand fully the impact and scope of this event. In writing this chapter, the authors hope that the practical information provided here can begin to help student services professionals who work directly with college students develop and implement programs and services that will address students' transition and adjustment now and in the future.

The landscape of higher education is ever-changing. The students who are coming to two- and four-year institutions are becoming more diverse in every aspect, from their racial or ethnic background to the academic credentials and personal experiences they bring to college. Taken together, this diversity should be celebrated; at the same time, it poses challenges for student services professionals in meeting the needs of college students. The goal of this volume is to introduce contemporary issues facing higher education and to provide clear recommendations for practice and policy that can be implemented in strategies that are appropriate for the different institutional cultures and contexts. The recommendations are not supposed to offer a one-size-fits-all approach, but they are meant to give professionals the opportunity to make an introspective examination of their processes and procedures. The reality is that college students, new or continuing, will always be in transition. As a result, higher education institutions must continue to understand their students and develop programs and services to foster personal, intellectual, and psychosocial development.

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## References

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