

## Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Miller, Richard I. *Major American Higher Education Issues and Challenges in the 1990's*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1990, 200 pages. Price: \$49.50 U.S. (hard cover). Reviewed by Donald N. Baker, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Reviewing the development of higher education in the United States in recent decades, Richard I. Miller discerns decennial patterns, all with funding challenges at their core: "Financing higher education in the sixties took on urgencies that resulted from an unprecedented building boom; the seventies with their deep national economic problems put expansion into a deep freeze, and accountability and management systems became prominent; and the eighties with an unprecedented national attention on quality and assessments" (p. 15). This book, which is addressed to "senior post-secondary administrative officers and their planners, governing board members, and state and national planners," is intended "to provide information and insights about what might be expected in U.S. higher education in the nineties" (Preface).

A veteran senior administrator (including stints as academic vice-president in three universities), author of half-dozen books and more than 75 articles on aspects of higher education, and currently director of the Educational Leadership Programs of Ohio University, Miller is widely known for his works on the role of evaluation in higher education. His books review institutional practices in a field, assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, and identify pitfalls to be avoided and desirable features to be embraced. This book conforms to the pattern. Miller identifies ten "challenges" relating to higher education in the United States, rehearses relevant trends and developments, projects their trajectories into the nineties, and offers practical advice on how to address them. The ten areas are: "changing demographics," "minority access and success," "international competition and cooperation," "creative frugality," "ethics and morality," "general education" requirements, "teacher education," "cooperating with other sectors," "assessment and accountability," and "leadership and management." Each theme is given a chapter, including a list of references.

In the eighties, Miller writes, postsecondary education made "considerable progress toward increasing access, enhancing quality, recognizing diversity, solidifying lifelong learning, identifying new problems such as ethics and morality, and international competitiveness" (p. 23), setting "the tone for the nineties when more consolidation of ideas and programs will be likely, when more concrete programs for minority access and success will emerge, when our campuses will make strides toward building international cooperation and competition into their basic thinking and programs, when morality and ethics will become more openly discussed and operational programs will come into being, and when creative frugality will bring forth greater attention to accountability and effective leadership" (p. 23).

Miller's suggestions for addressing the challenges of the nineties are wide-ranging, common sensical and hard-hitting. In addressing the challenge of minority access and success, for example, after reviewing the failure of past affirmative action programs, he calls for "The development, operation, evaluation, and subsequent modifications of a comprehensive campus-wide plan for minority access and success..." (p. 58). This time, however, the faculty must join administrators in implementing the plan. Faculty must become "participants and planners in campus minority activities and programs," if they are to succeed (p. 59). "Faculty members may be the missing link to greater minority access and success. Today, admissions is involved, student services are involved, and now it is the faculty's turn to exercise its very considerable wisdom and influence" (p. 60). Not one to leave a discussion at the point of moral injunction, Miller goes on to suggest ways to secure faculty support: Changes may be necessary in "the faculty reward structure to recognize their meaningful participation in minority-related activities..." (p. 59).

After reviewing the varieties of "general education" programs and requirements, Miller concludes that "Most general education programs resemble a cafeteria line...without guidance about those foods that are necessary for a balanced diet. This process is not any more conducive to nutritional health than a smorgasbord of academic subjects is to sound general education" (p. 126). For Miller, "The core general education curriculum with some prescribed courses for all students is the soundest approach to general education" (p. 131). As "governance and guidance by committee action usually is only slightly better" than having "nobody in charge" (p. 130), he recommends assigning responsibility to someone "who is keenly interested, has campus-wide respect, and some administrative and campus political skills" (p. 130). To make all of this possible, Miller advocates "pro-general education" campaigns both "within

academe” and “outside academe” (p.133). He disdains tepid compromise: “If an institution espouses a core curriculum then allows the distribution principle to control the implementation, then there likely may be little gain beyond initial feelings of doing good” (p. 131).

Miller takes it for granted that in the 1990’s financial circumstances and expectations will require more explicit forms of institutional evaluation and accountability. Efforts should be expended, not on whether to engage in such exercises, but on the “rigorous review of the strengths and weaknesses of various assessment programs” in order to make “a good and right selection,” on instituting “in-service educational programs to update faculty and administrators in the knowledge and skills required to manage the newly installed assessment programs,” and on minimizing “faculty fear... by reducing communication barriers between departments and colleges” and by recognizing that “The most important guarantor of quality in higher education is the academic staff” (p. 178).

Throughout this **tour d’horizon** of issues confronting higher education in the U.S., Miller makes it plain that fine words are not enough to address the challenges he outlines, that action-oriented policies and action-oriented leadership are prerequisites to success. Postsecondary educational leaders in the 1990’s will need to be well versed in “the change process” (p. 200) and in “change models” (p. 202) and aware of the “success-and-failure-prone change strategies” (p. 207) he outlines. His final advice to the audience to whom he directs his book is to devote “greater attention to the processes of bringing about successful changes” and “finding ways to tease out change strategies from the plethora of assessment projects” (p. 210). He concludes: “It behoves [sic] us in postsecondary education to give greater attention to how ideas and innovations can be more effectively developed, implemented, and evaluated. And the anticipated accelerating rate of changes in the nineties needs an accompanying accelerated effort to learn more about managing change as a major component in ultimate successes or failures in making major improvements in postsecondary education” (p. 211).

This is not a particularly elegant book. There are too many undigested quotations, abrupt transitions, and inconsistencies in structure. Nor is it an exhaustive book. It says almost nothing, for example, about the delivery of courses and programs. But it is useful, bringing together a host of considered opinions and a good deal of practical advice from a man who has reflected at length on the issues and whose reformist temperament remains undimmed if tempered by long experience.