

Book Reviews/Comptes Rendus

Fetter, Jean. H. (1995). *Questions and answers: Reflections on 100,000 admissions decisions at Stanford*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Pp. 276 (including index). Price: \$29.95. Reviewed by Gary J. Krivy, The University of Calgary.

Jean H. Fetter, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions at Stanford University from 1984-91, provides us with a first-hand view of the admission process at Stanford University. As Dr. Fetter points out:

Although the following reflections are based on my experiences at Stanford, I think it is fair to say that they are generally applicable to any of the private American colleges and universities that are able to select no more than 30 percent of their applicants for admission. There are about 35 such selective institutions in the United States (p. 8).

One might ask whether it is important for admissions officers and others at a Canadian post-secondary institution to read this book. Although I have been involved with admissions for twenty five years and therefore enjoy such books, I would strongly endorse the reading of this book by those who are faced with ethical questions on giving preference to certain groups of applicants, or those who find themselves moving to a subjective method of admitting students to their institution. Dr. Fetter clearly explains all of the problems that can be encountered, but more importantly describes the system used by Stanford University which can be a model for other institutions to follow. The author also answers questions we have had about admitting athletes, the children of alumni, donors, and staff to a selective American private institution. For example, I did not know that the U.S. Department of Education in 1990 ruled that it was acceptable for colleges to give preference to children of alumni. It would be interesting to obtain a Canadian legal opinion on this matter given our human rights legislation.

This book is mainly about the admission of freshmen students since only 100 transfer students enter Stanford University each year from four- and two-year colleges. Each year Stanford receives approximately 15,000 applications from which approximately 2,600 offers of admission are selected. Of these 2,600 offers, only 1,550 students are expected to register with more than half of those not registering going instead to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and MIT. The majority of application files which include statements of interest, referee assessments, etc., are read four times by different staff. The Office of Admissions at Stanford includes 12 Directors of Admission, each with a particular speciality. Over 3,000 of the applicants "presented straight -A high school transcripts (p. 11)," As Dr. Fetter points out:

"...ultimately the selection of a freshman class at a highly selective institution involves considerable subjectivity, good judgment, and a sensitive understanding of the criteria for selection and the context of the individual applicant's circumstances, along with a healthy dose of experience to see beyond the quantitative measures (p. 25)."

Along with describing this process, Dr. Fetter gives us excellent advice on what our admission brochures should contain (clear criteria on how admissibility is determined), the use of numerical ratings (useful but limited in their application), how to set up a good waiting list (tell students the number of persons who are placed on a waiting list and historically the number who were subsequently admitted - do not rank), when to publish specific cut-off averages as compared to the mean of the admitted class, the use of interviews (does not like for selection purposes), the use of an admissions committee as compared to one person (prefers the latter), the use of random admission methods (too hard to explain why someone wasn't admitted), and giving preference to students with special talents and mathematical skills.

Given the U.S. context, Dr. Fetter spends part of her book on Affirmative Action and the role of Varsity Athletics. One may feel that such sections are not applicable to the Canadian scene, but it is never the less valuable to read about the ethical dilemmas that occur as well as the negative aspects of affirmative action programs. There are other topics of great interest to Canadian admissions staff and our student affairs personnel. Dr. Fetter discusses graduation rates and the factors which affect such rates with particular reference to athletes. For example, did you know that 93.3% of the Freshmen entering Harvard in 1984 graduated by August, 1989? How would our rates compare or are they more equivalent to a number of specified state universities where the graduation rate is as low as 26.3% (p. 166). Dr. Fetter believes that admission standards directly affect this rate.

The author also discusses the propriety of a question posed by Stanford on their application form: "Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offense? Our purpose, of course, is to learn whether the personal qualities of the applicant may adversely affect either the applicant's career at Stanford or the lives of fellow students and others (p. 197)."

She ends her book by summarizing ethical dilemmas that face applicants, their high schools, and the admitting institutions. Most of these ethical dilemmas are the same for Canadian institutions. One example suffices. Stanford University like many universities uses work cards when reviewing a file. One will place on these work cards the positive and negative aspects of an application. I was not aware that in 1992, the U.S. Department of Education ruled that admitted applicants have the right to see such work cards. (The ruling did not apply to applicants denied admission. Why, is not explained.) In 1992, more than 700 undergraduate students at Stanford University asked to see their work cards. The ethical dilemmas for referees and admissions personnel are enormous. Stanford no longer retains work cards after the admissions process is complete.

In summary, although it is interesting as well as informative to learn about the admission process of a highly selective institution such as Stanford University; this book will also be used by Canadian professionals for the invaluable information it provides about different admission methods and the pitfalls to avoid.



Wright, W. Alan, & associates. (1995). *Teaching improvement practices: Successful strategies for higher education*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Co., Inc. Pp. xviii - 402 (including index). Price: \$41.95. Reviewed by B. Gail Riddell, University of British Columbia.

For those of us who consistently defend the virtues of university instructional development programs, this book could be of much use. In prefacing a number of topic-specific chapters with one which surveys and documents the teaching practices and reward systems of four countries (Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia), the editor has set the stage for an inclusive approach to the subject of instructional development.

Unfortunately, the themes which emerge and are highlighted in that introductory chapter are not consistently followed through in later chapters. Several of these themes (relating to grants, reward systems, and other structural matters) are scarcely referred to again, which creates a sense of discontinuity for the