

Book Review / Compte rendu

Strange, Carney C. & Hardy Cox, Donna. (Eds.)(2016). *Serving Diverse Students in Canadian Higher Education*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. Pages: 290. Price: \$39.95 CAD (paper).

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As post-secondary enrolment has increased dramatically over the past thirty years, so too has the diversity of the students represented on college and university campuses across Canada. These demographic shifts require staff and faculty to reflect on our assumptions and practices as we strive to create campus communities that welcome and support the success of our evolving student bodies. However, much of the literature dedicated to understanding the lived experiences of diverse students on campus and supporting their success is grounded in research originating in the United States. Although there is value in the U.S. perspective, there are differences between the Canadian and U.S. contexts – the communities represented on our campuses, their histories, opportunities, and challenges.

In this edited volume, Carney Strange and Donna Hardy Cox offer a follow-up to their 2010 book *Achieving Student Success: Effective Student Services in Canadian Higher Education* – this time focusing specifically on how Canadian post-secondary institutions can meet the needs of diverse learners. This latest offering represents another crucial step forward in the establishment of a body of literature specific to supporting student success at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

The book is divided into three sections. Strange and Hardy Cox begin with an overview of student diversity in Canadian higher education and a review of theories of diverse student success. The second section is divided into nine chapters, eight of which focus on the characteristics, challenges and strategies encountered in meeting the needs of specific student populations, including: Aboriginal students, Black students, Francophone students, LGBTQQ students, international students, students with disabilities, mature adult learners, and first generation students. Each chapter is written by practitioners and scholars from across the country who share their personal experiences serving diverse students in a Canadian context. Student Affairs and Services practitioners will appreciate

the direct connections between theory and practice illustrated through the presentation of several high impact programs and services currently in place at post-secondary institutions across the country.

Section Two concludes with a chapter that addresses navigating group rights in diverse campus communities. Written by the late Jim Delaney, this is one of the highlights of the volume. At a time when conflict abounds on many of our campuses regarding the balance between freedom of expression and the right to a safe learning environment free from discrimination or harassment, this chapter offers an exceptional introduction to these issues for those new to administration and a welcome refresher for more seasoned professionals. Through the use of several case studies and the presentation of a helpful model for understanding the spectrum of discourse on campus, Delaney offers practical guidance for how post-secondary institutions can protect the primal values of civility and free speech, while continuing to promote constructive dialogue among diverse communities.

The book concludes with the editors' reflections on the preceding chapters. Strange and Hardy Cox assert that "student success is not solely a matter of individual student effort, but also a function of how well the institution adapts to the needs of each student" (p. 215). They offer six principles of good practice for promoting success in a diverse student body, as well as several questions intended to guide institutional improvement efforts.

The structure of the book offers a broad overview of the ways in which Canadian post-secondary institutions may address the needs of specific communities of diverse learners. It is well organized for use in introductory courses related to the student experience in higher education or professional development activities designed for administrative staff on college or university campuses. However, this structure also gives rise to a limitation of the book, acting as a barrier to discussions of intersectionality.

For many staff and faculty, it is the increasingly interconnected nature of students' multiple identities that challenges us to reconsider the ways in which we are (or are not) appropriately supporting their success. Many of the services for diverse students on our campuses are organized in silos similar to the organizational structure of this volume, leading students with multiple intersecting identities to face challenges navigating a complex system that often fails to address them in a holistic manner. Strange and Hardy Cox do raise the topic of intersectionality in their introductory chapters and conclusion, and the chapter on first generation students presented by Tim Rahilly and Lisa Buckley offers a detailed account of the often interconnected identities of first generation students. However, the topic is referred to only sporadically throughout the other chapters, and it does not constitute a theme that is effectively represented throughout the entire volume. The lack of a consistent commitment to addressing intersectionality throughout the book results in a neglect of aspects of identity that are not represented by stand-alone chapters, but which often overlap and can significantly impact a student's experience – such as gender and religious faith. It also limits discussion of overarching systemic barriers that may impact diverse learners' access to post-secondary education, their college or university student experience, and post-graduate opportunities.

Despite this concern, creating campus communities that welcome and support the diverse learners represented in this volume is unquestionably an urgent issue for Canadian post-secondary institutions. Whether through organized protest, one-on-one conversation, or their absence – our students are telling us that we need to do better. Yet, many campuses

remain in the early stages of these processes. Strange and Hardy Cox acknowledge this reality in their Preface, along with the limitations of current research and theory. The editors suggest that this volume is “meant to be provocative of current assumptions and approaches while leading to steps that will improve the prospects for success of diverse students on campus” (p. xiii) – and readers should approach the book with this mindset.

Overall, *Serving Diverse Students in Canadian Higher Education* is a worthwhile resource for any Canadian Student Affairs and Services scholar or practitioner who wishes to reflect on their assumptions, practices, and the degree to which they have adapted to meet the needs of today’s diverse learners. The volume offers an introductory overview and an effective starting point for those wishing to expand their knowledge. Those looking for a more complex critical analysis of the ways in which Canadian post-secondary education supports diverse students will need to delve deeper. However, the accessible format and direct links between theory and practice presented by the authors will hopefully encourage many scholars and practitioners to do just that. 🍁