

Stanley R. Levy & Charles E. Kozoll (1998). *A Guide to Decision Making in Student Affairs: A Case Study Approach*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd. Pp.xi, 182. Price: \$43.95 US (hardcover), \$29.95 US (paperback).

Reviewed by Lynn Hamilton, Executive Assistant to the President, The University of Manitoba.

As the wave of “baby boomers” began to wane, competition for a share in the declining mass of would-be postsecondary students emerged among universities. Maintaining enrolments through comprehensive retention strategies became important, and terms like “student service” and “student affairs” took on new meaning for people who work in these areas. Those who used to merely process forms and other documents for long lines of students, now find they must work faster and provide friendly, courteous service along with clear, empathetic and correct advice. Two major additional factors complicate the student affairs area. The first is that funding for postsecondary institutions has declined significantly to a point where some feel the quality of academic programs has begun to deteriorate. Beyond covering costs for academic programs and essential physical services, little is left for support of other important areas.

The second factor affect student affairs is found in the increasing threat of litigation from those students unhappy with events presented to them while they attend university. Both factors create a mine field for the student affairs professional who, in effect, must accomplish more with less focusing on creating a pleasant and helpful environment while at the same time being very, very careful not to make a costly mistake.

Levy and Kozoll have provided a practical guide for crossing the mine field. “Even in the most predictable of campus environments, every decision has a ‘crap shoot’ element about it ... Unforeseen variables enter the picture, confounding the most respected and wisest of managers” (p. v). Drawing from the knowledge and experience of primarily vice presidents and vice chancellors for student affairs (p. 5), the book is intended to assist student affairs personnel at any level in making good decisions in ever changing situations.

The first chapter is devoted to helping the reader determine his/her place within the institution, what kind of service or decisions are necessary for specific situations (large and small universities, for example), and who the other players are who may affect or influence outcomes. In

the second chapter the emphasis is on the logical steps to decision-making in any arena along with a very informative section on the role of environmental scanning (pp. 17-18). Finally, the authors devote a section to bias with a cautionary note that student affairs professionals do not have the same privilege of academic freedom as do their professor colleagues and must remember this when the media or influential people become involved.

Having created the framework within which the student affairs professional works, the authors present twenty-one case histories divided into seven categories and drawn from universities from across the United States. These case studies cover a wide variety of problems which may be encountered by student services professionals in areas such as financial aid, residence issues, equality issues, student social affairs, staffing and personnel matters. All of the case studies include a clear presentation of the setting, environment, issues, major players, and the role the reader assumes along with a list of several to many decision options. A section on class activities invites the reader(s) to choose a decision.

An interesting aspect of the book is that an appendix provides the reader with the authors' best decisions on each of the cases presented. This makes the book a self-learning tool for those who wish to test their own abilities at decision making in student affairs.

Throughout all chapters, Levy and Kozoll attempt successfully to stretch the imagination and knowledge of the reader. Many times, in a large institution, tradition and the dread of setting "dangerous precedent" preclude innovative decision making. While Levey and Kozoll have a respect for both tradition and precedent setting, they also recognize the individual circumstances which surround most student problems within the university.

Once the fear of making an unusual decision has been conquered, the authors emphasize the need to collect as much information as possible before coming to a decision since repercussions can be expensive and time-consuming. It is the authors' ability to "stretch the mind" which makes this book of value to the student services professional. Through the text, the reader is required to consider not only past practice but also the people, power structures, obvious and veiled sides of the issues, good consequences, bad consequences, financial implications, academic implications, personal implications. However, the authors do not require or suggest that only good decisions be made. Sometimes,

they suggest, it is necessary that a poor decision be made because of public opinion, well established policy, or other factor specific only to the situation in question. For these types of poor decision, Levy and Kozoll provide sound rationale which justifies the making of a poor decision almost making it a good one. This is a valuable thing for new student affairs personnel to learn. All problems are not simple; all solutions are not ideal.

Student services personnel often deal in a realm fraught with emotion. Students appear with severe financial difficulty; academic insufficiencies; social fiascos. It is difficult not to ignore the rules and rush to the aid of the student in order to alleviate his/her pain. The situation is not much different in situations where the student services professional deals with personnel problems in the office. These, too, have an emotional component. A student services employee serious about putting fairness over compassion and who reads this book with a view to making better decisions will find a template which encourages professionalism in all matters, the weighing of potential long-term consequences of any decision, why too much haste can be dangerous, when and when not to use the past as a guide, the merits of conflict, and how to remain true to oneself when making decisions which touch on personal standards of ethics and professional conduct (p. 140).

A Guide to Decision Making in Student Affairs is a comprehensive and well organized learning tool for either established or would-be student affairs personnel. The language is succinct and lacks any hint of patronization as the lessons are systematically put forth. In closing, I found Levy and Kozoll's book to be clear, concise, well-informed and well-written with a view to the necessary human side of student affairs.



Diana G. Oblinger & Sean C. Rush (Eds). (1997). *The Future Compatible Campus: Planning, Designing, and Implementing Information Technology in the Academy*. Jaffrey, NH: Anker Publishing Company, Inc. Pp. 304. Price: \$34.95 US (hardcover).

Reviewed by Kenneth-Roy Bonin, Faculty of Education, Université Laval, Quebec.

For colleges and universities, this book could be characterized as an appropriate response to the wish expressed by Robert Burns in lines written