

# BOOK REVIEW

## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE AND WORK: POLICIES AND REFORMS AFFECTING HIGHER EDUCATION'S PRINCIPAL MISSION

REVIEWED BY

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Archer, Walter, and Schuetze, Hans G. (2019). *Preparing Students for Life and Work: Policies and Reforms Affecting Higher Education's Principal Mission*. Leiden: Brill Sense. Pages: 288. Price: 96.96 CAD (paper).

This volume, entitled, *Preparing Students for Life and Work: Policies and Reforms Affecting Higher Education's Principal Mission*, presents fifteen papers from international scholars centered around the issue of the purpose of higher education (HE), HE reform, and the preparation of students for participation in work and society (the principal mission). Contributors to this volume are mainly scholars who participated in an international workshop on HE at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2014. Editors Walter Archer (Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, and former President, Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education) and Hans G. Schuetze (Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia, and Visiting Professor, Renmin University of China) organize a thorough study of Canadian and international issues in the student experience in HE related to particular policies and reforms. The volume is presented in three parts, with an introduction and discussion of the principal mission of higher education to provide context for the analysis that follows. The three sections of the book explore the issue of the principal mission in Canada (part one), internationally (part two), and finally, in relation to the role that students play in influencing HE policy and reform (part three).

Following the introductory remarks by editors Archer and Schuetze, the first chapter entitled, "How Central is the 'Principal Mission' of the University Today", written by Chris Duke, contends with the changing idea of the principal mission of universities in the United Kingdom. From the "good old days" (p. 1) to more current chal-

lenges in global education ranking systems, community engagement, and students as stakeholders, Duke's account of the principal mission provides a foundational idea for the chapters that follow. There is little critique of preparation for life and work as the principal mission of HE throughout the text. The mission of the university, Duke writes, is a phenomenon largely influenced by or reflective of broader sociopolitical and economic conditions. As this book asserts, preparing students for life and work may remain the mission of HE, but the mechanisms by which this happens, and the external pressures that influence a tipping of the balance towards life, or towards work, change over time.

Part one brings attention to policies and reforms affecting the experiences of Canadian students. In chapter two, Schuetze and Archer discuss the issue of access to HE in Canada, demonstrating that there is still a great deal of work to do to create accessible and fair HE in Canada. This is demonstrated through chapters by Michelle Pidgeon, and Mahadea A. Sukhai. Pidgeon explores the role of HE in the lives of Indigenous students and the sustained systemic violence within Canadian institutions despite efforts to "indigenize the academy" (p. 57), calling for attention to the diversity within the Indigenous student population in Canada and more. Sukhai's contribution dispels myths about the experience of graduate students with disabilities in Canada that impact students' academic relationships and development. Part one ends with a review of the work of student affairs and services staff in Canada (Kyle D. Massey), explicating

the structure and principles of this growing field in Canadian HE. In part two, the contributions focus on policies and reforms from a global perspective, including labour market myths and adult students in Mexico (Wiestse de Vries; Germán Álvarez Mendiola and Brenda Yokebed Pérez Colunga), degree value in Japan (Shinichi Yamamoto), and first generation students and tuition fees in Germany (Andrä Wolter; Dieter Timmerman). This section also addresses Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as a global trend (Maureen W. McClure), and explores an international student's experience of learning conditions at different institutions (Jade Zhao). Each chapter centers the experience of students impacted by reform. Readers familiar with a Canadian perspective will see the Canadian HE policy landscape reflected in many of the international cases presented.

The final section of this text provides an interesting overview of the role students play in effecting change by way of collective organizing and activism. Using the cases of student associations in Quebec (Alexandre Beaupré-Lavallée & Olivier Bégin-Caouette), including the "Maple Spring"<sup>1</sup> and other student movements (Hans G. Schuetze), and student unions in Europe organizing in response to the Bologna process in 1999 (Pavel Zgaga), the authors demonstrate the significant role students have played in mobilizing policy reform that reflects both broad global trends and local student interests. This is in stark contrast to a comment earlier in the text by Duke regarding the political behaviour of youth, which suggested that online learning environments may be a "relief to [administrators and faculty] if it isolates students at home with their laptops instead of rallying on campus and taking to the streets" (p. 11). Instead, this section recognizes the value of students as political actors pressuring their institutions—as well as national and international governing bodies—towards more inclusive and accessible policies for participation in HE.

What many authors in this edited volume identify is that despite increased access to HE, policies at the institutional and state levels perpetuate harm, discrimination, and (re)create barriers to success for students for whom HE can be a challenging or even violent space. In particular, this volume explores the experiences of Indigenous students, students with disabilities, adult students returning to study, online students, first generation students, and international students in Canadian institutions and abroad, providing insight for readers into the effects of policy on these students in HE global-

ly. An important takeaway from this book is that policies that grant increased access to HE do not guarantee that students also experience meaningful preparation for life and work, and authors call for greater attention to the impact of policies and reforms on that greater mission.

This text does not address the impact of policies and reforms on faculty or research in HE institutions, instead focusing analysis on the student experience. The attention to student experience as affected by policies and reforms is a welcomed commentary, as the authors point out in the introductory chapter by writing that, "[g]iven the central place that students occupy in higher education it is remarkable how relatively little research has been done on the situation of this group" (p. xviii). The inclusion of the chapter by Massey on student affairs and services in Canada points to an opportunity for scholar-practitioners conducting student-centered research to situate the experience of students on campus within the broader context of policy and reform in HE globally.

*Preparing Students for Life and Work* would be best suited for any educator, policymaker, scholar, or administrator whose work in the education field intersects with students and the student experience in HE. The text is effective at providing contextual information such as historical timelines or explanations of structural organization, while also providing analysis and calls for change.

## Notes

- 1 "Maple Spring" refers to the student protests against tuition increases that occurred throughout 2012 in Quebec, Canada which followed the "Arab Spring" protests of 2011 in a number of Arab countries.