

Book review

Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Approaches for Diverse Populations

edited by Shaun R. Harper and Stephen John Quayle

Routledge, 2008, 368 pages, £21.99
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One might expect a volume about student engagement to be highly engaging. As a recent graduate and graduate trainee I didn't always find this to be the case.

This book begins by identifying student engagement as "participation in educationally effective practices both inside and outside the classroom". It is argued that by increasing engagement in all campus activities you can enhance student retention, achievement and satisfaction. The book provides useful guidance on improving student engagement, which is increasingly important in today's competitive market.

The significance of a strong relationship between the institution and the student is highlighted throughout each chapter. The chapter authors – graduate students like myself – identify the need for a power sharing rather than power struggle approach.

Each chapter sets the scene and provides a

theoretical framework before giving practical advice for overcoming some of the challenges. The book covers a range of student groups including ethnic minorities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, part-time and international students, and student athletes. It stresses the importance of creating a sense of community within these groups; however, a number of the strategies identified actually border on segregation rather than integration.

So why didn't I find the book particularly engaging? It conveys a range of useful lessons, but for a UK reader it comes across as very US-centric, making it less applicable to institutions outside the US. The quality of chapters is highly variable, too, with some immediately engaging and others written in an off-putting way. It is a useful contribution to the literature, but perhaps not a priority purchase.

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Graduate trainee

METHODOLOGY: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

This new peer-reviewed journal presents a selection of short papers on the innovative approaches to research being pioneered by postgraduate and early career researchers at Leeds Metropolitan University. It will be a useful guide for those new to research and others who would appreciate a concise introduction to a range of methods and approaches to research in the social sciences.

It will be published in January 2010 and will be available through the Leeds Met ALT website (www.leedsmet.ac.uk/alt/index_publications.htm).

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