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MacKinnon, Fiona J. D. & Associates, editors. (2004) *Rentz's Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education*. Third edition. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

The contributors to *Rentz's Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education* simultaneously provide a comprehensive overview of the student affairs profession and specific information unique to the various functional areas encompassed within the student affairs umbrella. In a sense, the contributors completed a remarkable task and offer readers a far-reaching introduction to student affairs practice. Yet, the text's value is also limited by the same breadth that makes the text distinctive.

The text can be divided into three primary sections. The first two chapters provide a digest of educational philosophies and the historical development of American higher education. The main body of the book is a series of chapters individually focused on a functional area of student affairs. Finally, the book concludes with a chapter concerning the social role of the professional.

The two introductory chapters form an important basis for the entire book. Chapter 1 is an excellent introduction to philosophical traditions such as Neo-Thomism and Existentialism. A section listing a series of questions that can be asked to determine one's own philosophy seems especially useful for those new to the profession. Still, a single chapter on philosophy can do little more than inform the reader that philosophy matters in higher education, although one should not underestimate the value of that simple lesson. Chapter two includes coverage of Colonial education through the modern research university. An understanding of American higher education's rich historical legacy is tremendously valuable to student affairs professionals and the chapter provides a truly outstanding outline of the relevant history. Once again, however, the book is limited by its breadth absent of depth. For example, the Yale Report defending classical education, the development of specialty schools (e.g., US Military Academy and MIT), the Dartmouth case separating state and private colleges and the Morrill Acts, which led to land-grant and research institutions, are covered in a single page.

With the foundation for student affairs covered in the first two chapters, the next eleven chapters are each focused on a unique area of student affairs. Together, these chapters are a fine overview of the most common functions of student affairs work. Yet, they lack the depth necessary for anything more than the most elementary understanding of the functions. The chapters give the impression of a dissertation abstract or the Occupational Outlook Handbook. For example, the ways technology and fundraising are changing the roles of Career Services directors are covered with a two sentence paragraph.

As career centers have become increasingly sophisticated in the use of computer technology, directors face complex decisions about which database management systems, hardware, local area networks, and software to purchase and/or update. To supplement shrinking budgets, many directors solicit donations from corporations and foundations and funding from other outside agencies. (p. 134)

A good idea incorporated into this book is the inclusion of a “Technology Resources” section at the end of most chapters. These sections include links to a variety of online sites related to the chapter’s content. Most of the sites were useful resources, although some links were no longer valid just two years after the book’s publication. The bibliography of the book was also rather dated. While the book was published in 2004, relatively few of the sources were published even as recently as 2000. If the purpose of the book was to merely introduce the concepts of student affairs, the relevance of sources would be more important than the dates of sources. The book’s title includes “practice,” however, and more recent data are necessary for the reader to become familiar with current practice.

Rentz’s Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education concludes with a chapter on the social role of the professional. The chapter reads like a lesson on social work, as much of the content is focused on progressive issues, such as “working to change institutional structures and policies that perpetuate oppression” (p. 389). Affirmative action is promoted along with “educating all students...to be effective advocates for their own and for others’ liberation” (p. 389). Ironically, the cover of the book could serve as an object lesson for this chapter. Of the six students on the cover, all are white, five are women and four are blond. Further, they all appear to be of traditional college age and they dress like the cast from an Old Navy commercial.

While *Rentz’s Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education* is a common text for introductory student affairs courses, I fail to see enough value in this book to justify its cost for students. That is not to say the book cannot find a place in many professional libraries. Student affairs positions are frequently held by individuals who did not graduate from student affairs programs. For those entering the profession without the specific student affairs training, this book could be an excellent first resource. *Rentz’s Student Affairs Practice in Higher Education* does provide a good introduction to the profession and wonderfully demonstrates student affairs as an important part of the educational missions of colleges and universities.

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