

## **Book Review by Brian A. Vander Schee, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Aurora University**

Seidman, A. (Ed.). (2007). *Minority student retention: The best of the journal of college student retention: Research, theory & practice*. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company. 318 pp. ISBN-10: 0-89503-331-3, ISBN-13: 978-0-89503-331-4 (\$49.00)



As college and university budgets are squeezed ever so tightly, accountability and efficiency are highlighted in institutional planning and resource allocation. Since tuition and fees represent a significant portion of the revenue stream in the institutional budget, most in higher education have accepted the fact that it is in their best interest to exercise whatever influence they have to the fullest extent on student retention. However, the most effective way to retain students in higher education is less well known; thus, it is the subject of much discussion. The issue of college student retention was solidified as a scholarly and practical pursuit in 1999 when Alan Seidman, founding editor and executive director of the Center for the Study of College Student Retention, first published the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. The articles in this peer-reviewed quarterly publication range from demographic description to programmatic intervention, and how each relates to student retention. Although many authors take a purely institutional approach to the problem, some focus on certain student populations nationally or in a particular institutional setting such as community colleges or private 4-year universities.

As Seidman explains in the introduction of *Minority Student Retention: The Best of the Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, college enrollments are becoming more diverse and although more minority students are entering college at a higher rate, they are also leaving at a higher rate than nonminorities. Siedman's stated pur-

pose of the book then is to show what has been done—and currently is being done—to raise questions, to stimulate debate, and to clarify future research in minority student retention. The book is divided into six sections with one to five articles in each. These cover African American students, Latino/a students, Asian and Asian Pacific students, Native American students, biracial students, and institutional retention efforts. Although the text is limited to 14 articles, the reference list provided with each adds depth and serves as a valuable resource for further investigation.

The first section on African American students opens with chapter 1: an article highlighting the findings of research on African American males in community colleges. Authors Linda Serra Hagedorn, William Maxwell, and Preston Hampton purposed to determine factors and subsequent policy to provide academic success to this subset of the population. More specifically, they sought to identify significant factors in predicting retention among African American males in an urban community college setting. One significant finding was that dropping courses was an indication of possible nonretention. Since colleges track courses enrollments and withdrawals, the authors suggest it is possible to adopt policies to communicate expressed concern and available resources on campus. Chapter 2 examines the retention of African American women in college. Robert Schwartz and Charles Washington sought “to determine if specific cognitive, noncognitive, and demographic variables could predict academic success and retention among African American females at a historically Black, private liberal arts college” (p. 29). The results of this study suggest that high school rank is the best predictor of academic performance, and that social adjustment is a significant predictor of persistence. Thus first-year African American females who were academically prepared and were satisfied with their college experience were most likely to achieve success and continue enrollment.

Chapter 3 focuses on a minority engineering program for African American students. Although the limited sample size made statistical analysis difficult, the qualitative approach of Jennfier Good, Glennelle Halpin, and Gerald Halpin provided interesting insights. Their adoption of a semistructured interview protocol outlined in the appendix serves as a valuable reference for retention professionals. The author of chapter 4, Frank Glenn, took a more holistic approach including

survey research as well as case studies as he examined the retention of African American males at community colleges across Texas. His quantitative research suggests that identifying at-risk students at enrollment and monitoring their academic progress is the most influential institutional retention strategy. Chapter 5 is unique in that Sharon Holmes, Larry Ebbers, Daniel Robinson, and Abel Mugenda provide a model to assist African American students to achieve their academic goals in the context of predominately White institutions. The model suggests that validation, both in and out of the classroom as well as off-campus, is vital to increasing retention and graduation rates among African Americans.

Section two contains two chapters on the retention of Latino students. Chapter 6 provides an overview of personal, environmental, involvement, and sociocultural factors that influence Latino student persistence. The strength of this approach lies in the recommendations provided by John Hernandez and Mark Lopez for appropriate institutional responses given the heterogeneity of this subgroup of the college student population. Chapter 7 also examines persistence among Latino students but uses a qualitative approach by describing the experiences of five Latino students who graduated and five who stopped out of a large Midwestern university. Martha Zurita uses in-person interviews to investigate “the impact that differences between their home culture and university culture had on their academic achievement” (p. 124).

In chapter 8 Theresa Ling Yeh highlights the fact that although Asian American students persist to graduation at a higher rate than White students, there exists a number of subgroups that persist at much lower rates. After providing a thorough literature review, the author outlines general challenges faced by Asian Pacific Americans and then recommends specific strategies that can mitigate the detrimental influence of certain individual and institutional factors. The researchers in chapter 9, Mary Jiron Belgarde and Richard LoRé, used a pluralistic research approach to examine the effect of a newly implemented retention and intervention program on the persistence of Native American students. The authors argue that retention programs designed for Native American students must bridge an understanding between value systems to be successful.

Chapter 10 focuses on retention issues related to biracial students. Researchers Nicole Sands and John Schuh use qualitative methods in their case study to learn about the nonacademic experiences of biracial undergraduates, to explore how the racial identify formulation of biracial students was affected by their experiences at the institution, and to develop specific recommendations to develop institutional initiatives to improve their retention. Recommendations include expanding racial categories on admission applications, developing appropriate programs and services, and establishing a learning community specifically for biracial students.

The final section of the book contains four chapters on institutional retention efforts. Chapter 11 describes a nationally recognized institutional model of multiculturalism of a residential liberal arts college. Evon Walters provides an historical and institutional context with an emphasis on cocurricular initiatives. She recommends guidelines for institutionalizing diversity and multicultural issues, including assessing the institution's current status, developing an appropriate action plan, and creating an appropriate assessment process. The following chapter by Vernon Padgett and John Reid, Jr. provides an overview and assessment of a campus-based student diversity program. In particular, it reports on research using a retrospective quasi-experimental design showing that students who participate in the Student Diversity Program graduated at twice the rate as nonparticipants.

Chapter 13 reports on the results of a qualitative study of the relationship between race/ethnicity and the process of integration of minority students at a predominantly White institution. Kathleen Morley identified six racial/ethnic dynamics that hindered the social and academic integration of minority students, including: "the role of family life, being placed socially by race/ethnicity, racial/ethnic accountability, the pervasiveness of White culture, the pursuit of a color-blind society, and the overrepresentation of minority students among weaker students" (p. 264).

The final chapter of the book by John White described a qualitative research case study designed to better understand the experiences of minority students when faced with the challenge of not knowing the academic discourse, or cultural identity as manifested in the linguistic style of the university. The most significant outcome of learning acad-

emic literacy and the accompanying requisite skills was an increase in student academic performance. This investigation, grounded in sociological theory, was a fitting end for a book that challenges educators to think differently about how minority student attrition can be minimized. It is clear that further research is needed to better understand which factors contribute to success and thus how programs can be implemented to assist minority students in reaching their academic goals.

As a former enrollment manager and current full-time faculty member, the book resonated with my sense how institutions should foster student development and academic achievement. As the percent of the U.S. population represented by minorities continues to grow, it only makes sense that the best outlook for the economic prosperity of the nation and the personal fulfillment of its citizens is to implement strategies that foster graduating all students. Given the unique factors that lead to attrition of students from various minority groups, research in this area is valuable and necessary. The quantitative and qualitative approaches used by the researchers in this text provide a foundation for future studies and add richness to current works. Faculty, administrators, academic advisors and support staff, as well as student development professionals should find this book informative and motivating. Given its design as 14 separate articles, it is easy to read in smaller time allotments and thus can be digested in just a few days. Interested readers may also enjoy another book edited by Alan Seidman, *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (2005).

## References

- Seidman, A. (Ed.). (2005). *College student retention: Formula for student success*. Westport, CT: American Council on Education / Praeger.