Applying Student Development Theories Holistically: Exemplar Programming in Higher Education (Book Review)

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Branch, K., Hart-Steffes, J.S., & Wilson, C.M. (2019). *Applying student development theories holistically: Exemplar programming in higher education.* New York, NY: Routledge. 184 pp. ISBN: 978-1-351-21231-1. $106.53 suggested retail price.

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In the book *Applying Student Development Theories Holistically: Exemplar Programming in higher education*, Branch, Hart-Steffes, and Wilson provide student affairs practitioners with holistic and contemporary applications of student development theory in an effort to inspire intentional and research-based practice. Authored by faculty who teach college student development theory, Branch et al. saw a classroom need for "theory utilization taking place in actual practice settings" in addition to the applications found in case studies or those created by students in the classroom (2019, p. xiii). Although this text was foremost intended for graduate students seeking current applications of the information they are learning in the classroom, it could also serve as a developmental resource for faculty and staff seeking to inform their practice using theory.

This anthology is divided into three parts: "Who Am I?", "How Do I Make Meaning?", and "Influences on Development." Each chapter's author(s) provides background information on the institution where the program originated, a description of the program, the guiding theories that informed the program, the implementation specifics, the assessment and evaluation process, and a personal reflection including lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

Part one, "Who Am I?", discusses psychosocial and social identity development, or the development of one's

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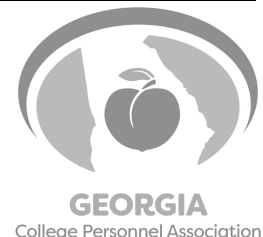
identity in various contexts. Student affairs practitioners are provided with four examples of programs that use theory to guide the development of student identity: *Launch*, a pre-orientation retreat for first-year students at Randolph-Macon College, *Mizzou Black Men's Initiative*, a program designed for first-year African-American men at the University of Missouri, *Tippie Buddies*, a "buddy" program between international and domestic students in the business program at the University of Iowa, and Western First Generation Students (W1GS), a student organization for first-generation college students at Western Illinois University. The guiding theories behind these initiatives include: Identity Development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), Student Involvement (Astin, 1999), Mindset and Perseverance (Dweck, 2012), Microaggressions and Climates for Diversity (Sue, 2010), Black Identity Development (Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001), Sense of Belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), Ethnic Identity Development (Phinney, 1993), First-Generation Student Experience (Davis, 2010), Self-Authorship (Magolda, 2001), and Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984).

Part two, "How Do I Make Meaning?", offers practitioners three tools designed to develop student cognition, or one's ability to learn, think critically, and make meaning of experiences: *Ethical Reasoning in Action*, a campus-wide initiative at James Madison University that encourages students to reflect before making a decision, *Individual Accountability Plans (IAPs)*, personalized action plans that promote self-authorship and accountability for student-staff members in their positions at Miami University, and an unnamed curriculum model—a combination of meetings, readings, one-on-one interactions, and self-assessments—for student-staff members in the Pride Center for Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity at Lehigh University. Using the following theories, these strategies encourage students to make meaning of their experiences inside and outside of the classroom: Perry's Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development (1970), Stages of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1981; Gilligan, 1982), Orders of Consciousness (Kegan, 1994), Self-authorship (Magolda, 2004), and Learning Partnerships (Magolda, 2004).

Part three, "Influences on Development", acknowledges the endless amount of circumstances that can affect the student experience (e.g., discrimination, family dynamics, changing majors, coursework, and preparation for graduation; Branch et al., 2019) and presents two initiatives designed to take advantage of these circumstances and inspire growth: *Transport Passport*, a joint program at Ivy

Tech Community College Indianapolis Service Area and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis for supporting transfer students in their transition from a community college to a four-year institution and *Passion to Action*, a two-part program that encourages students at New York University to establish and partake in a residential culture rooted in social justice and advocacy. These initiatives were driven by the following theories: Transition Theory (Schlossberg 1981, 1984), Vectors of Identity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993), and Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984). Part three also includes a thematic analysis of the reflections offered by the text's scholarly practitioners and a summary of the 26 proposals submitted for publication in the book (including the nine that were ultimately chosen).

The 26 proposals include programs from small, medium, and large four-year, public and/or private institutions across the United States. It is also important to note that submissions came from a community college in the Midwest and an institution that is religiously-affiliated. Although the nine initiatives ultimately chosen for publication represent various student populations and institutional types, this book has the potential to serve as a comprehensive guide for all student affairs practitioners with the addition of other student populations, institutional

types, and functional areas outside of those mentioned in the text.

Despite this, the text serves as an excellent resource for students and professionals alike. It is worth noting, however, that this book should not be taught or referenced in isolation. As the authors acknowledge, this text should be used in conjunction with other publications like *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Patton et. al., 2016). This textual combination will allow the reader to reference primary source material, or the original publication of the theory, before referencing its contemporary application. Furthermore, readers should keep in mind that the initiatives described in the text are "not for wholesale or ready for transfer" to other institutions of higher education (Branch et. al, 2019, p. 161). Rather, the examples provided are meant to serve as inspiration for individuals seeking a starting point in this process. The success of a program is determined by a myriad of institutional, cultural, political, economic, and social factors; many of which cannot be duplicated.

As Susan R. Komives describes in the foreword, much like flying a plane, applying student development theory to practice is not magic; it is the union of science, art, and a little bit of luck. Although this process may seem supernatural to graduate students, new professionals, or

those outside of the field entirely, *Applying Student Development Theories Holistically: Exemplar Programming in Higher Education* demonstrates that applying theory to practice is doable. What is magical, however, is witnessing the positive impacts of this process in the lives of our students.

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Abigail Meert is graduate student pursuing her M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration at Georgia Southern University where she serves as a Graduate Resident Director in University Housing. Her bachelor's degree is in history from Armstrong State University, now named the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern University, where she assisted students in her role as a Resident Advisor, First-Year Peer Mentor, and Honors Ambassador for three years. Abigail's research interests include higher education law and policy, university systems, and the consolidation of post-secondary institutions.

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