

Book Review:

Minority Student Retention: The Best of the Journal of College Student Retention

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Racial minorities represent about one-third of the undergraduate students at degree-granting institutions in the U.S. (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox & Provasnik, 2007). African American and Hispanic students persist at much lower rates than white or Asian students (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Only 46% of African American students and 47% of Hispanic students who enrolled in four-year institutions in 1995-95 completed their degrees within six years, compared with 67% of whites and 71% of Asians (Berkner, He & Cataldi, 2002). Most institutions do a mediocre job in providing successful undergraduate experiences for minority students (Anderson & Dongbin, 2006). Retention, however, is one of the most commonly researched topics in higher education and there a strong body of literature to explain why undergraduate students may or may not persist (Tinto, 2005). A recently published edited volume, *Minority Student Retention: The Best of the Journal of College Student Retention* (Seidman, 2007), seeks to address the disconnect between higher education research and practice and the reality of minority student retention.

Minority Student Retention contains the 14 best articles on minority student persistence and retention to have been published in the *Journal of College Student Retention* (Seidman, 2007). This quarterly peer-reviewed journal is dedicated to research, theory and practice on student retention and attrition in higher education and is aimed at the educational community, government officials, and the general public ("Journal," 2008). The book under review and the journal are edited by Alan Seidman who is the Executive Director and Founder of the Center for the Study of College Student Retention, an organization that provides retention advice to universities and colleges. Seidman, a former student affairs

administrator, is widely published and is a frequent conference speaker on retention issues (“Alan Seidman,” 2008; Seidman, 2007).

The articles in *Minority Student Retention* pertain to retention research, theory and practice as related to African American, Latino/a, Asian and Asian Pacific, Native American, and biracial students. It also includes articles on institutional practices and programs geared toward retaining minorities. All of the articles share the common thread of minority experiences in community colleges and four-year universities. The majority of the articles are based upon original research and both quantitative and qualitative approaches are represented. There are also institutional case studies, impact assessments, and evaluations and descriptions of particular interventions to improve minority student retention. A few of the pieces are theoretical in nature and provide a general examination of the persistence of specific minority groups.

The book contains five articles about African American students. These articles deal with the retention of African American males at community colleges (Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hampton, 2007; Glenn, 2007), the academic success of African American women at a historically black private four-year institution (Schwartz & Washington, 2007), the impact of minority programming for black engineering students (Good, Halpin & Halpin, 2007), and African American student experiences at predominantly white institutions (Holmes, Ebbers, Robinson & Mugenda, 2007). The two articles on Latino/a students concern general issues impacting Latino/a student retention and a qualitative piece on the perceptions of Latino/a students of their undergraduate experiences.

Yeh (2007) discusses the issues impacting Asian and Asian Pacific student persistence, while Belgarde and LoRé (2007) examine personal and institutional factors affecting retention of Native American students. Sands and Schuh (2007) provide a case study of a program to retain biracial students at a four-year institution.

Four articles describe institutional programs to improve retention. They focus on institutional commitment to diversity (Walters, 2007), sociolinguistic challenges of minority students (White, 2007), social and academic integration of minority students at a predominantly white university (Morley, 2007), and an evaluation of an academic support program for at-risk students (Padgett & Reid, 2007).

Minority Student Retention is a valuable resource for faculty and administrators alike. Those interested in research on minority student retention will find solid articles that are informative and will stimulate new avenues for research. The practical nature of many of the chapters will appeal to campus administrators, as well as academic advisers, student affairs professionals, and mental health counselors. While the *Journal of College Student Retention* seeks to also reach government officials and the general public, unless the articles in *Minority Student Retention* are summarized into some sort of policy brief and disseminated, they will likely not reach these audiences; as is the case with most academic journal articles and books.

Seidman provides a brief introduction to the book by discussing the increasing diversity of U.S. higher education and the low graduation rates of minority students as compared to white students. Overall, though, the volume suffers from a lack of editorial voice. The articles were originally written and published separately, and as a result, they are fairly unconnected in terms of focus. A strong concluding chapter from the editor or a

commissioned piece by another scholar would have tied the articles together and made a stronger contribution to the field of minority student retention. As it stands, *Minority Student Retention* is a showcase for a set of good articles, but it does not have a central message about retention of minorities.

The absence of an editorial voice is also evident in the lack of typical organizational details of edited books. No information is provided on the authors of the articles, such as professional affiliations and credentials. Nor is any information provided about original publication dates in the *Journal of College Student Retention*. An internet search informed me that some of the articles were published as far back as 1999, when the journal was founded ("*Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*," 2008). Indeed, some of the data dates from the mid-90s.

The process used to select the articles for publication is ambiguous. An impressive list of established scholars and administrators chose the articles for publication in *Minority Student Retention*, but there is no explanation of the criteria that were used to determine the best articles. Apparently, the experts started with a group of 28 articles and chose only 14 for recognition. More details on what typified the best articles would have clarified the selection process and been of benefit to young scholars who are getting started in their publishing careers.

Education, especially a college degree, is increasingly important for improving one's social and economic status (Swail et al., 2003). Too few minorities are successful in obtaining a degree. *Minority Student Retention* shines a light on this problem by recognizing sound research on minority student retention. It falls a bit short, however, in making a cohesive statement about this very important topic.

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