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Review



PreparedU: How Innovative Colleges Drive Student Success

Gloria Cordes Larson

(San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017, 288 pages)

PreparedU focuses on ways universities and colleges can prepare students to be successful leaders and citizens in today's world. Gloria Larson answers the question from her perspective as president of Bentley University, one of the leading business schools in the US. The book will be of interest to directors and administrators of summer session because of the opportunities presented in Larson's hybrid learning approach to higher education.

Larson's approach differs from the common understanding of combining in-class and online instruction. She outlines ten features of hybrid learning that include blending classroom and hands-on learning, connecting to co-curricular activities, and mandating internships.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first two chapters introduce the challenges faced by higher education, particularly when traditional thinking is being confronted with a changing global environment and economy, as well as new generations of students. In chapter 3, Larson argues that higher education needs to graduate students with a range of knowledge and so-called *hard* and *soft* skills. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, she describes the kind of higher education experience needed to develop these "new" graduates. For example, in chapter 5 she argues in favor of sticking with place/campus-based education. Chapter 6 provides multiple examples of hybrid education being introduced in colleges and universities in the US. The final chapter examines how the hybrid learning approach was meaningful to the millennial generation of students, and is especially critical for the next generation, Generation Z.

The book is written in a personal style that conveys Larson's experience at Bentley University and includes a limited review of the literature. Interestingly, she provides numerous references and examples of other universities and colleges to illustrate her recommendations.

The main theme of the book is a challenge to higher education institutions to think about preparing graduates for success. Larson proposes that colleges and universities adopt a hybrid learning approach to keep in step with hybrid jobs that requires hybrid employees. In other words, she argues that graduates need to acquire knowledge from multiple disciplines and develop a wide-ranging repertoire of skills.

In addition to her experience, her thesis is based on the *2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report* that identified factors that affect the well-being of graduates after college:

- a professor who excited them about learning and cared for them as individuals
- a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals/dreams
- a long-term project (semester-length or longer)
- internships that applied classroom learning to real-world situations
- participation in extracurricular activities and college organizations

Further, the report claimed that only 3% of graduates surveyed indicated that they had experienced all of these factors. Colleges and universities should take note of this, particularly summer sessions where programming and setting could serve these student needs. The well-being factors provide an action list from which summer sessions (directors) can solidify their role within the academy. For example, professor-student relationships can be more readily built in summer sessions because of smaller and more concentrated classes. Other factors are more closely connected with programming in summer session, like opportunities for internships and experiential, project-based learning, including study abroad experiences.

Larson's proposal for a hybrid learning approach to improve the value of college/university experiences for students would include the following:

- blending classroom teaching and hands-on learning
- requiring all students to take at least one business course
- requiring all business students to take liberal arts courses
- providing opportunities to apply new information technologies to chosen fields of study
- connecting co-curricular activities to course of studies
- training faculty and students in mentorship
- beginning career services in freshman year
- making internships mandatory for all students
- connecting real-world problems to the classroom

With these approaches in mind, one can further connect summer session's role to hybrid learning. For example, summer session

- provides a time when students can take courses to complement their major fields of study (e.g., non-business students take business courses, business students take liberal arts courses);
- allows use of campus services (such as career services) at off-peak times;
- offers skill-based and experiential opportunities, including study abroad and internships;

- promotes teaching by visiting faculty and community-based experts; and
- allows smaller, extended classes where supportive/mentoring relationships can develop more readily between professors and students, and among students.

Larson holds what might be termed a neo-liberal view of higher education that professes that a major role for institutions is to prepare students for the job market. While this has always been a broad purpose of higher education, it is not the primary focus of higher education held by all. On the other hand, we hear much about university graduates being unprepared for work, and this book provides strategies to respond to this complaint.

The reader should also be aware of the business school orientation of the book, which explains, in part, Larson's views about the role of higher education; business schools tend to have a greater interest in preparing students to go directly into the job market. At the same time, Larson does provide examples of hybrid learning at non-business colleges and universities.

If one accepts Larson's recommendation that moving to a hybrid learning approach is critical to student success, then summer sessions have a role to play in creating/fostering hybrid learning to increase the value university/college experiences for students and to make those experiences more relevant to the job market.

*Review by Bill Kops
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