

Chapter 1

The Real Question: Why Write This Book?

ABSTRACT

This chapter overviews the purpose of this book and is designed to help the readers leave a legacy, but only by adapting, changing, and designing policies, procedures, and classroom experiences that serve our students will that legacy come to fruition. Institutions with strong visions, missions, and legacies create traditions but also leave room for flexibility to work in this dynamic and changing global environment. In the introductory chapter, the authors seek to define the term post-traditional learner, as well as the interdisciplinary research approach the authors utilize, and share the rationale for the book.

JARED COOK'S MEMORIES

One of my most vivid educational moments came from my master's program several years ago, and, arguably, became the catalyst for my desire to write this book. Several years ago, a guest lecturer was invited to class. Here is a summary of his story.

Picture a young man growing up several decades ago. Times were good. He was younger, a full-time student, and could dedicate most of his time to studies. For work, he spent the summer working full-time in the fields, came back with enough money to pay for tuition, and some pocket change on the side for the rest of the year.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0145-0.ch001

Fast forward to the year 1995; he's been a university president for eight years. The enrollment is soaring, he's making changes and helping his university thrive. Fast forward again to 2015; he's retiring after 28 years of being president. Enrollment has grown at the institution for the past 17 years. International partnerships with several countries have led to increased revenue. Now, this is a true story, but here is what struck me. It wasn't his service, nor the institution's high enrollment, or that a third of the total budget came from international ventures, nor was it his dedication to the same university for 28 years. It was the fact that he could dedicate himself to a single venture, work, or education, all while having enough money to support himself.

At the heart of our institutions is our students. Without understanding his students, the 28-year legacy wouldn't have existed. This book is designed to help you leave a legacy, but only by adapting, changing, and designing policies, procedures, and classroom experiences that serve our students will that legacy come into fruition. Institutions with strong visions, missions, and legacies create traditions but also leave room for flexibility to work in this dynamic and changing global environment.

Presently, there are a few challenges to the focused approach of the past. Public state tuition has increased by over 237% on average in the past 20 years (Boyington, 2017). Paying tuition from a summer's salary is, for most people, long gone. With rising financial costs, as well as decreases in state funding, students are forced to adapt to this new realization. State funding has decreased by nearly nine billion dollars over the past ten years, leading to many institutions cutting corners and passing the buck to students (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017).

So where does this leave us? As administrators, instructors, and potentially students ourselves, we need to adjust. Quickly, efficiently, and intentionally, without sacrificing the cornerstone of our institutions' quality education. With rising costs and students' needs, it is no longer viable to rely solely on the original works by Mezirow (2000), Tinto (1981), Knowles (1980) or Tough (1971). Instead, we must place into service these base theorists to move a new set of guidelines forward, guidelines that emphasize the growing changes in our society due to changing economics and disruptive technology. By embracing these changes, you and we, will stand to gain a better understanding of your and our students. You and we, will also find ways to approach issues with policies and procedures that could affect student stop-out rates.

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