

Book Reviews



Kolodny, Annette. *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century.* Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Pr., 1998. 298p. \$24.95, alk. paper (ISBN 0-8223-2186-6). LC 97-037781.

Annette Kolodny's credentials to offer a dean's perspective on higher education are impeccable. She is a recent dean of the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona; the book cover describes her prior experiences as "a distinguished teacher, a prize-winning scholar of American literature, a feminist thinker." *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century* fits neither its title nor its stated purposes. Rather, the book describes some experiences of one dean, few of which would be generalizable. The way these experiences were written led me to conclude they were more a catharsis for the author than a prescription for the next century.

In fact, the book's major failing is a clash among many intentions. Readers should be warned that this book will not help them learn how to be a dean or even to know whether—or how—to criticize current administrators; in short, readers should not expect to read a book about "deaning." In the final chapter, Kolodny seems to discover that her purpose in the book has been to alter the conversations about education by changing the questions. She does this by sharing a collection of her opinions on education from kindergarten through graduate school. The topics covered do not organize into a systematic whole, which lessens the value of anything that could be called a premise or a major argument.

Confusion over the book's purpose continues into the writing style. Is it a collection of speeches? Is it written for alumni and Rotary Club lunches? Finally, either the editor or the author needed to eliminate duplicative references to expe-

riences. There are no graphics; the index is adequate. Many of the items in the nine-page bibliography are from the 1990s, but the use of popular sources diminishes the seriousness of the answers. The author may have reason to be pleased with the college's promotion and tenure document and the "Summary Checklist of Selected Family-Friendly Initiatives and Programs" developed under her leadership, but they add little to her look at higher education in the twenty-first century.

Recommended only for comprehensive higher education collections or collections at the University of Arizona.—*Martha Hale, Emporia State University.*

Levine, Arthur, and Jeanette S. Cureton.

When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. 188p. \$29.95, alk. paper (ISBN 0-7879-3877-7). LC 97-042414.

Academic librarians who have been left puzzled by encounters with the current generation of college students may well find their experiences described in this study of the 1990s collegiate culture based on surveys conducted between 1992 and 1997 of 270 chief student affairs officers and 9,100 undergraduates, and supplemented with on-site interviews of staff and students. Arthur Levine, president and professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and former executive editor of *Change* magazine, has been extensively involved in higher education research. Indeed, in many ways, *When Hope and Fear Collide* is an extension of his 1980 book *When Dreams and Heroes Died*. Joined by fellow academic and researcher, Jeanette Cureton, Levine offers a concise overview of the concerns and needs of college students.

Beginning with a generalized look at the social conditions behind the media images of generation X, the study examines student attitudes toward world and national politics, campus politics, multiculturalism, dating and social life, academics, and expectations for the future. The first chapter, a mini-history of world events since 1979, sets the tone for the entire work stressing highlights over details and summaries over deviations. Although a wide variety of students—community college, undergraduates at both public and private colleges, commuters, dorm residents, 18 to 21 year olds, and “nontraditional-age”—were included in the surveys, the authors focus on general trends and patterns. Individual student voices are presented through anecdotal quotes scattered throughout the text, with summaries of survey data provided in thirty-nine brief charts and tables.

The central conclusion of the book is that college students in the 1990s are not following the patterns established by previous generations. Where student cohorts once alternated between focusing on individualism and on activism, this generation appears to be caught between the cycles, frequently offering highly contradictory responses. In particular, these students view their personal futures with hope but face questions about national and international affairs with fear. They are both demanding of change and desirous of security; disenchanted with politics and more intensely aligned with right or left, rather than centrist, positions; sexually active and socially isolated; career oriented and altruistic; more diverse and more divided. This paradoxical behavior is attributed to the “profound demographic, economic, global, and technological change” in the United States today.

Of particular interest to librarians are the descriptions and commentary on student consumer mentality and learning skills, some of which may sound hauntingly familiar. Levine and Cureton conclude that students approach colleges as they do banking or other services in that

they “want their colleges nearby and operating at the hours most useful to them, preferably around the clock. They want convenience . . . no lines; and polite, helpful, and efficient staff service. . . . They do not want to pay for activities and programs they do not use.” In comparing the consumerism of students in the 1970s with that of students in the 1990s, the earlier generation is portrayed as reacting to a general trend toward social institutions—post-Watergate and Ralph Nader—whereas this generation is reacting to a sense of separateness from campus life fostered by competing job commitments and increasing part-time attendance as well as to specific criticisms of higher education.

The authors further describe students as interested in getting the most for their money but hampered by weak learning skills and the increasing complexity of information. Adopting some fanciful imagery, they conclude: “For students in the 1990s, the process of acquiring pieces of information is like trying to fill a teacup with a fire hose.” For those faced with teaching under these conditions, the suggested answer is to encourage the incorporation of critical thinking, continuous learning, and creativity into all aspects of the curriculum. In addition, Levine and Cureton argue for concentrated efforts toward fostering hope, a sense of responsibility, an appreciation of differences, and a belief that individuals can make a difference.

The principal virtue of this work is also its greatest weakness. Written in an engaging style with little jargon or statistical detail, it offers helpful insights but may leave readers wishing for more specifics. Given the bleak portrait of social skills and racial and gender divisions, as well as the contradictions between attitudes and expectations, the summaries and brief quotes leave a sense of questions unanswered. This work is best read as an introduction to the issues and a starting point for discussion rather than a final report. And the issues it raises are well worth discussion and further examination.—*Jan Blodgett, Davidson College.*