

Student Development in the First College Year: A Primer for College Educators.

By Tracy L. Skipper

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Historically, the holistic development of students has been a major objective of American higher education (Stanford, 1992). As both a theory model and philosophy, the notion of student development offers higher education a path for impacting students. A command of student development theory has been seen as paramount for professionals within higher education. An operational knowledge of student development theory enables not only student affairs practitioners, but all employees in an academic environment to better respond to and understand the needs of the student population. Understanding students—their experiences and the challenges they will face in college—also facilitates the design of interventions to ensure success.

Student Development in the First College Year provides a basic understanding of the families of theories within student development theory. The text begins with a review of the critical connection between student development theory and the first year of college. This includes a review of pertinent research, an address of development both inside and outside of the classroom, and a discussion of the families of student development theory. The families of theories presented are psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typological, and person-environment interaction theories. The chapter concludes with an overview of the theories that will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two focuses on psychosocial theories and opens with an in-depth analysis of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of psychosocial development. In addition to the explanation of the theory, a visual representation is provided. It moves next to the areas of racial identity of college students, including Cross's (1971, 1991) model of African American identity development and Helms' (1990) model of white racial identity. Sexual identity development is briefly highlighted. Development across multiple dimensions of identity illustrates the fluidity of development and that students can exist in multiple places. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research on college's impact on development.

Chapter Three addresses the cognitive development of college students, providing background on several prominent cognitive theories. Cognitive development affects the way students relate to others and define themselves. Theories covered include Perry's (1970, 1981) scheme of intellectual and ethical development; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule's (1986) theory of women's development; and Kohlberg's (1976) development of moral reasoning, to name a few. The chapter closes on a brief discussion

of how enrollment in college impacts cognitive development.

As the shortest chapter in the text, Chapter Four addresses models of retention. The works of Astin (1984, 1999) and Tinto (1993) are introduced and provide the reader with a basic understanding of factors impacting retention in higher education. Research conducted as follow-up to existing models of retention is also mentioned. The materials in this chapter direct the reader to resources for further examination. A critical point that arises from the chapter is that existing models do not account for differences in race and ethnicity of students.

Chapter Five focuses on the application of the previous theories to practice. Strange & King's (1990) theory-to-practice model is used to demonstrate how the theories can be applied to daily practice in higher education. The theory-to-practice model is well defined and provides a foundation for application of the materials presented. The three examples utilized for application are applying theory to a composition classroom, to a residential learning initiative, and to learning community practice. Each example follows the model of 1) formulating a theory, 2) examining existing research, 3) designing the practice, 4) evaluating the outcomes, and 5) returning to theory. Through providing such a detailed opportunity for application, this chapter could be extremely helpful to a new professional or individual without a working knowledge of student development theory and its applications.

The final two chapters briefly mention strategies for assessing outcomes and offer a holistic view of development. The strategies presented provide a basic foundation for designing an assessment plan. The authors list references for further inquiry that can direct the reader to more detailed information. The author has succinctly provided both a refresher to those familiar with student development and a beginning knowledge base for those unfamiliar with this terrain. The diagrams, charts, and figures in the book provide clear reference points for the reader and visually reinforce the materials presented. One recurring theme throughout the text is that student development theory is not all inclusive, nor should it be applied to all student populations without consideration of student differences. Factors such as race, ethnicity, previous educational background, and type of institution must be considered when working with students. Theory is presented as the scaffolding for higher education professionals to view the experiences of students and guide interventions and programmatic efforts.

Reference

Stanford, S. W. (1992). Extracurricular involvement and development among undergraduate student leaders. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 12(1), 17-23.