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Book Review of Challenging and Supporting the First Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College

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Book Review of Challenging and Supporting the First Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College

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BkRev # 762. Upcraft, M.L., Gardner, J.N., Barefoot, B.O. and Associates. (2005). Challenging and supporting the first year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 640 pp. ISBN#0-7879-5968-5, to order call 1-800-956-7739 or see their web address www.josseybass.com. Price \$55.

The gurus of the first-year student experience have done it again! In this 640 page tome, Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, and Associates cover a full range of topics from recruiting first-year students to assessing their college experiences. Including topics as varied as creating campus cultures for success and challenging students both in and out of the classroom, these authors do an admirable job combining topics with their supporting case studies into a volume that remains true to its theme.

As advisors we know that today's first-year student bears little resemblance to the "Joe College" on our campuses twenty years ago. The depth and breadth of chapters included here attest to the changes that have taken place, not just in student demographics, but in the technologies that have brought -- and wrought -- changes our campuses are challenged to address unless we remain frozen in a time long since passed.

Some advisors may see little point in reading anything beyond the chapter addressing Academic Advising, in part because student affairs and academic affairs are not always in agreement regarding the definition of student success. However, as George Kuh states bluntly in Chapter Five, "Student success is everybody's business" (p. 87). This book more than supports that assertion as it points out that both arenas are responsible for verbalizing expectations in curricular and co-curricular settings. "What do the all-too-common outdoor campus scenes of tanned students sitting under leafy trees on sunny days communicate about expectations for intellectual engagement?" (p. 117) is a question that should make all of us sit up and take note of the messages -- intended, implied, or otherwise -- that we send our students.

For those involved in the first year experience programs, this book may be little more than a review of what has been said before. For those who hoped for a slim, get-down-to-business, how-to manual, the repetition of information and time required to read 640 pages may be frustrating. But take heart, the authors have included a 'Recommendations' section at the end of each chapter that truly serves as 'The Handbook'. For those new to higher education or to the first year student experience, this book well is worth your full attention.

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