



Helping College Students; Developing Essential Support Skills for Student Affairs Practice

By Amy L. Reynolds, Jossey-Bass, 2009

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The perceived distinctions between faculty roles and student affairs roles remains pretty clear on most campuses, despite articles and conference presentations arguing the need for cross-functional conversations and collaboration. The distinction between administrators—whether in student affairs or academic affairs—and those who work in direct contact with students also remains a fairly clear line.

With respect to the need for helping skills by professionals in higher education, Amy Reynolds helps to blur those lines. While *Helping College Students* focuses on helping skills needed by student affairs practitioners, and the examples and supporting illustrations are drawn from student affairs practice, the book describes contexts and issues related to helping in such inclusive and convincing ways that faculty and other professionals in higher education will also find information they can use to increase their effectiveness in their work on campus.

New faculty members sometimes note that their doctoral programs provided them with knowledge in their academic discipline but did not prepare them with the skills needed to teach. Along similar lines, Reynolds notes that master's degree programs in student affairs may provide little, or even no, specific preparation for the development of helping skills crucial to practitioners in the field. When they do offer them, they may draw upon courses from master's degree programs in counseling. While such courses offer some useful concepts and skills, Reynolds contends that they do not cover the wider range of helping skills needed in positions in student affairs. *Helping College Students* is intended to fill the need for a text for graduate programs in student affairs, as well as to provide a general resource that will raise awareness of the necessity of helping skills in higher education and of the range of those skills needed for effective practice.

The book is divided into two sections. Part 1, Understanding The Helper's Role, includes an examination of skills, challenges, and benefits related to student affairs practitioners as helpers (Chapter 1), a review of current mental health issues and concerns on campuses (Chapter 2), an overview of specific ethical issues related to helping and strategies for addressing them (Chapter 3), and basic information on counseling theories related to helping, along with guidelines for developing a personal theory of helping (Chapter 4). Part 2, Essential Helping Skills, offers information related to multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills (Chapter 5), communication and microcounseling skills (Chapter 6), conflict and crisis management skills, (Chapter 7), group situations and group development (Chapter 8), and supervision and mentoring (Chapter 9).

The field of student affairs is diverse in terms of job titles and departments in which practitioners might work. In line with a basic tenet of the book, that every student affairs practitioner needs helping skills, Reynolds groups the functional areas within student affairs into four core areas and throughout the book provides specific examples of the need for helping skills for each of the areas: "(1) counseling-oriented positions like career and personal counseling; (2) leadership development and development positions (e.g., student activities, Greek affairs, campus life, health and wellness, and residence life); (3) administrative positions like dean of students, judicial affairs, and admissions; and (4) academic affairs positions (e.g., advisement and academic support services" (p. 16).

The realistic and practical examples of situations calling for helping skills within the various functional areas make a strong case for the need for helping skills wherever one might work in the field of student affairs and provide a broad view of the contexts and skills involved in helping. The examples also illustrate that serving students well not only requires ability to work with students but also the ability to work effectively with parents, various constituent groups and colleagues, and those we supervise or lead. The portions of the book dealing with multicultural competencies, supervising, and group work particularly underline the use of helping skills beyond one-on-one work with students.

In addition to providing illustrations of specific contexts calling for helping skills, Reynolds makes extensive use of references to books and articles related both to student affairs and to higher education in general. While the references mark this as an academic work, the book is written in a very readable and organized manner. The citations not only provide solid grounding for the points Reynolds makes and the information she provides, but also offer a rich resource for further exploration of issues and skills related to helping in higher education settings.

Reading this book will not equip readers with polished, ready-to use helping skills. Readers will, however, leave with a more comprehensive understanding of the scope, necessity, and particulars of helping skills needed to work effectively with students and to help them succeed. That kind of knowledge will benefit both higher education professionals and the students and others with whom they interact.