

# Foreword

In 1964 Bob Dylan told us, “The times, they are a-changin’.” Forty-five years later higher education is still facing change. Students are different, teaching is different, learning is different, technology is different, curriculum is different . . . the world is different. The mission and functions of higher education have been altered, largely from outside the academy, and this has led to the greatest change of all—an expectation, often a demand, that higher education move away from its traditional role of identifying those whose innate academic skills allow them to succeed in a competitive college environment and move toward a commitment to ensure academic success for the vast majority of those who enter college, including an increasing number of under-resourced learners.

This paradigm change carries with it a clear need to reconsider the strategies and methods we use to help our students learn and adjust to the demands of achieving a degree. Chief among these is the recognition that the students who step into (or login to) our classrooms have widely different sets of experiences and backgrounds that significantly affect their opportunity and ability to succeed. A narrow, traditional view of college teaching and learning—and the resources allocated for student services—simply cannot accommodate this new diversity. In this book Becker, Krodell, and Tucker consider previous work on issues outside the classroom that affect student learning, then extend that work into the classroom by examining what college instructors and student services personnel need to know and do in order to respond to the experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of a changing student population.

One can argue that new expectations and demands for accountability are contrary to valued traditions—or that the purpose of “higher” education is to sort those who can learn effectively and step into leadership positions from those who cannot learn effectively and who step into the workforce at different levels. We cannot survive in these changing times if we adhere to this view, but at the same time we do not have to sacrifice quality, dedication, or acceptance of the simple fact that a teaching-learning partnership must be based on mutual respect and mutual acceptance of responsibility. This book is about building that partnership—whether in the classroom, seminar room, office, small group setting, or online.

Indeed, for both instructors and student services staff, the most powerful personal motivation to serve in the college setting and the strongest affirmation of the teaching-learning process come from observing student progress: gains in knowledge, skills, and thinking. Such gains reflect not only the acquisition of information but engagement with that information, along with the development of complex and sophisticated habits of thought that are the hallmarks of “an educated person” who will go on to make significant differences in the world beyond college. This book has that motivational intent as its subtext and undercurrent. It provides instructors with a new framework from which to design effective instruction, and that framework is built around understanding students as individuals whose sum of life experiences may help or hinder academic progress. One might ask why this focus instead of an emphasis on the ideas, concepts, and principles of disciplinary content. That question would miss the point because this book does not propose to supplant content with process. Rather, *Understanding and Engaging Under-Resourced College Students* deals with an approach that can be used to help more students acquire content knowledge more effectively. If, as instructors and student services personnel, our strongest motivation is to have our students “learn the material,” then we must consider all the factors that relate to learning. Content is only print on a page, pixels on a screen, or talk in a classroom, absent the engagement of a student’s mind and heart. Becker et al. tell us about enhancing and deepening that engagement because it is what makes content and learning real.

When we are asked “What do you teach?” we often think first as disciplinary specialists and respond with the names of our disciplines. This is understandable because, as teaching and student services professionals, many of us have devoted a large part of our lives to our disciplines, but *what* we teach must be considered in light of the fact that both teaching and learning are essentially human interactions. *Who* we teach is equally important, and it follows, then, that consideration of the persons involved (students and those who help them learn) is as important as consideration of the content. Learning happens when those persons and that content interact or, as Palmer says, “[w]hen my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illuminated by the lightning-life of the mind. . . .” But Palmer makes another important point. He says, “In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved . . . if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called teacher on whom so much depends” (1998, pp. 1–4).

# CHAPTER 1

## Colleges, Resources, and Economic Class

In today's economy, institutions of higher education are invaluable forces for community change through both the students they educate and the engagement and advancement of the larger community. Economic forces are bringing an increasingly diverse student population to the doorsteps of these institutions compared with the past. Many more of today's students are under-resourced—that is, students without the advantage of fully available financial, personal, and support system resources necessary to well-being. Many cannot read, write, and compute at the college level and have years of baggage from their school experience. For college personnel to achieve maximal effectiveness in reaching these students, paradigm shifts are needed in the ways teaching and learning are understood and actualized on campuses.

This is a sensitive subject, and so it is important from the outset to note the distinction between social class and economic class. Social class tends to be about comparisons, envy, and judgment while economic class, at a personal level, is about resources and gathering strength to build a future based upon one's own choices. Describing patterns is a useful means of beginning to understand groups of people. Applying the patterns associated with economic class to assess under-resourced learners—and analyzing and adjusting the strategies available to support and educate them—offers a different perspective for faculty and staff to consider. The patterns that emerge within economic classes are an

how normalization affects individuals and society. A variety of media can be used to demonstrate how profoundly race impacts the individual's experience. Once again, the strategy of moving between the personal and the political, the individual and the society, provides a means to process complex theories that may have had profound personal impact. The discussion surrounding the personal, cumulative effect of race on the individual may shift the perception of the students who are white with regard to what the students of color have and will continue to experience, regardless of their income or wealth. Strategies for survival and for creating a more equitable community/society take into account both the role of individual action *and* how individuals can interact with and impact the community and policies that affect them. Part of the ensuing resource assessment encourages students to build the networks and strategies that may ameliorate the effects of racism, help them address racial inequalities in income and wealth, deepen their understanding of racism, and heighten their appreciation of diversity.

## **2. UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC CLASS: PAYNE'S FRAMEWORK**

Economic class is the primary lens through which the issues in the curriculum are studied; an important part of the picture is the “hidden rules of economic class.” *The Getting Ahead, College Edition* curriculum introduces a theoretical framework filled with the sorts of rules, symbols, and well-defined problems that students will encounter in other coursework. The hidden rules are presented as a set of “laws” governing different groups in society—including people in poverty, middle class, and wealth. The driving forces, norms, and values associated with these three economic classes are powerful and foundational to the hidden rules of class that must be understood in order to move from one class to another. The driving forces of each class create a sense of identity that affects the students' perceptions and experiences as they use these normally unspoken and unwritten rules to create a different understanding of their current situations and problems.

Coming to understand the hidden rules of class is about learning *what* and *why* you do what you do—and likewise understanding the behaviors of teachers, peers, bosses, and politicians. As students realize they cannot choose the economic class they were born into any more than they can choose their race or gender, they also understand and learn the rules and how the 11 resources are prioritized and organized. Depending on one's economic background, a person can choose to behave differently and, in so doing, find access to the power structures of society. By understanding and learning *how* to use the hidden rules of economic class, students can build their own resources and reach a

assets and liabilities—and make connections between the use of hidden rules and the acquisition of resources. This discussion will be foundational to the more detailed self-assessment of their own resources that students complete later, using a more comprehensive rubric.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES: ASSESSMENTS

Another goal of the *Getting Ahead, College Edition* curriculum is for students to take control of their lives by understanding change, defining their desired changes, consciously and actively moving through the change process, and monitoring their results. Students who may have been the subjects of school or agency plans, treatment plans, service plans, and care plans will become aware that some of those were the plans of (middle class) institutions attempting to identify their (the students’) problems that moved directly to the “fix”—thus providing an opportunity to discuss Miller and Rollnick’s (2002) “righting reflex” in action. Further, information about the process for change, based on Miller and Rollnick, is directly taught very early in the process so that students can assess their present state of change and understand their progress and setbacks. Group discussions of the barriers to change, particularly as they relate to educational goals, are useful in helping students whose past efforts in school or jobs frequently were derailed by concrete problems that demanded immediate action and took priority over school and work. Discussions such as these may be sparked as students complete an assortment of assessments throughout the curriculum.

One such assessment, the self-assessment of personal resources, is very important, and the students will have heard reference to it as a step to complete. Some of the students may be feeling apprehensive about this upcoming exercise. As the students prepare to do the self-assessment, it is important to draw their attention to the processes they have been using, particularly their analytical thinking. Facilitators will need to occasionally encourage the students to press on by using this thinking. It can be helpful to remind them that there might be a tendency to get discouraged by limited personal assets—that those resources arise not only from individual action but also from families and communities. At this juncture, the facilitator also can point out and talk about the resources in which the individual students are strong. In the subsequent planning process, students will be challenged to build resources they need to succeed. The facilitator’s role is to guide the investigation toward the idea of using students’ strengths and assets to build additional resources. At the end of the assignment, students will have another personal