

Closing the Opportunity Gap: Identity-Conscious Strategies for Retention and Student Success, Vinjay Pendakur, Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2016, 188 pp. \$29.95 (paperback).

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Institutions of higher education across the United States have researched barriers for students of minoritized and marginalized backgrounds. Many institutions use buzz words such as "retention," "matriculation," "sense of belonging or mattering," and "graduation rates" as metrics for student success. Trends have demonstrated that the country's educational system often includes systemic barriers that discourage or interrupt students' academic pursuits. Scholars have looked at the graduation rate for students who hold marginalized identities and their white counterparts in the achievement gap. Still, there is a shifting of research looking to explore the opportunity gap that exists and see how the system upholds ways to prevent success (graduation). Environmental and cultural factors including, but not limited to parental support, economic circumstances, abuse, and homelessness can influence how successful students will be in their academic pursuits on a college campus. When access has increased over the decades, the return in graduation rates has not increased as many scholars will like.

The answer is not as simple as a person may think in addressing how to close the opportunity gap. In the book *Closing the Opportunity Gap: Identity-Conscious Strategies for Retention and Student Success*, edited by Dr. Vijay Pendakur, he brings together the work of scholars who have used identity conscious strategies for retention and student success to implement programs that address the opportunity gaps at their respective institutions. The book emphasizes the importance of addressing the problems in closing the opportunity gap through intentional and developed programming with outcomes based on the students' experiences and identities.

The book's introduction discusses the need and calls for scholars and practitioners to close the opportunity gap for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students. To solve the problem, you must understand the problem. Scholars and practitioners should be aware that these students have experiences specifically centered around their identities that impact their overall collegiate experience. By creating programs and services that are identity centered higher education institutions can provide the support needed to overcome the challenges for these groups. This chapter states that it is the institution's responsibility to address the problem instead of the utilization of most colleges, which places ownership on the student to figure out how to be successful.

Each chapter (1-6) starts with a story to help bring awareness to an identity (i.e., students of color, low-income students, women of color, homeless students, and others). After the story, the author(s) of the chapter present the successful intervention implemented for their student population. This is done by outlining the problem, discussing a framework for addressing the issue, assessing the outcomes, and finally providing action items to help the reader in developing a program in which they can copy genius but tweak it to fit their student populations and needs. Chapter 7 calls on higher education institutions to utilize the identity-consciousness framework to be empowerment agents for all students. Far too often, only students who have been deemed to have high social capital feel empowered by institutional faculty, staff, and policies. Pendakur (2016) stated, "In summary, to serve as an empowerment agent requires staff or faculty members to have critically examined their own identity and their relationship to power and privilege and to have worked to create a resourced capital network of relationships for the benefit of marginalized

students (p.224)." As practitioners we, not only want to see students survive, we want to see them thriving. That responsibility is on the institution. Historically, institutions have worked from a deficit model that puts the burden on the student to advocate for their success instead of holding institutions accountable for creating an environment where all students can thrive. The last chapter of the book talks about the struggles students have outside of finances but through the lens of food and shelter insecurities.

This book is a must-read for university staff, faculty, and administrators at all types of institutions of higher education. This book has some limitations, including the perspective of community colleges, non-traditional students, students with disabilities, and international students, which would have been an excellent addition for the reader. This book offers perspectives and gives demonstrated solutions to addressing retention, matriculation, and a sense of belonging for students from marginalized and minoritized backgrounds. This book, which is written more as a novel, allows for the reader to understand strategies that have been implemented through an emphasis around the identity that the student hold(s) to ensure that the student transitions to college easily, has a positive collegiate experience, and graduates from the institution through conscious identity framework.