Contested Issues in Troubled Times: Student Affairs Dialogues on Equity, Civility, and Safety

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Published by: Stylus, 2019, 513 pages

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Not only do I wish I had discovered this text years ago, but I also firmly believe it should be required reading for all student affairs educators. Peter Magolda, Marcia Baxter Magolda, and Rozana Carducci's edited work *Contested Issues in Troubled Times: Student Affairs Dialogues on Equity, Civility, and Safety* is a manifesto, a call to action, and a guidebook for student affairs educators working toward inclusion on their campuses.

The authors firmly establish a sense of urgency for a range of critical topics and defend the rationale for this book: Campuses are becoming more polarized, and as educators we are charged with helping students gain the knowledge and skills to engage in dialogue and combat the inequities plaguing our campuses and broader communities. Students come to college with a diverse range of identities encompassing race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, ability status, language, immigration status, social class, and life experiences. We have the inherent responsibility to design inclusive programs and practices and disrupt systems of oppression that threaten identities that are not the norm.

The editors frame the book's central mission in the preface: "How can student affairs educators create an equitable climate conducive to learning in a dynamic environment fraught with complexity and a sociopolitical context characterized by escalating intolerance, incivility, and overt discrimination?" (p. xvii). The book builds on the companion volume, Contested Issues in Student Affairs: Diverse Perspectives and Respectful Dialogue, and consistent with the volume's theme, the editors structure the book as a model of effective dialogue between a pair of colleagues who jointly author each chapter.

The book has four parts. Part 1 (Introduction) sets a solid foundation for readers to understand the necessity of fostering inclusive environments on our campuses. Yet, establishing inclusive campuses is not the ultimate outcome; rather, the authors posit that creating inclusive learning environments has significant and positive ripple effects for students to advance equity and justice as change agents in their contexts and communities. Part 2 (Cultivating Inclusive Learning Environments: Equity, Civility, and Safety) delves into 12 topics of inequity in higher education (and arguably society) and weaves the themes of equity, civility, and safety throughout each chapter. This part, in particular, has significant importance for orientation, transition, and retention professionals who build and maintain campus partnerships with other departments advancing inclusion on campuses. For this reason, Part 2 affirms the importance of establishing networks of support for students.

Part 3 (Cultivating Professional Capacities to Foster Inclusive Learning Environments) is ideal for graduate students preparing for careers in student affairs. It examines necessary competencies for enacting equity and inclusion, including power and identity consciousness. Part 4: Epilogue addresses the potential for fostering inclusive learning environments within student affairs practice.
In each of the 24 chapters, the authors provide varying perspectives on a particular topic in addition to situating the topic within historical contexts. I think it is important to explicitly name the book's topics, as each deserves attention in its own right. This brief outline is not meant to negate the depth and complexity with which the chapter authors invite readers to consider the layers, challenges, and opinions surrounding each topic as it relates to equity and inclusion.

Part 1: Introduction

- challenges to fostering inclusion
- strategies for teaching students the skills of difficult dialogue

Part 2: Cultivating Inclusive Learning Environments: Equity, Civility, and Safety racial justice

- political activism
- sexual violence on campus
- free speech and students' First Amendment rights
- student success metrics
- trans* students and personal pronouns
- intersections of multiple marginalized identities
- undocumented students

- social class inequities
- trauma-informed student affairs practice
- religion and interfaith approaches
- legislative action and institutional policy

Part 3: Cultivating Professional Capacities to Foster Inclusive Learning Environments

- graduate program preparation for equity, civility, and safety
- professional competencies for working in challenging environments
- graduate assistant dual roles: students and professionals
- bias and discrimination in graduate classrooms
- student affairs research for equity, civility, and safety
- assessment for equity, civility, and safety
- personal learning design for equity, civility, and safety
- social media and digital engagement
- student affairs educators' self-care practices
- promises and potential for inclusion

Part 4: Epilogue
- Human-centered and inclusive design in student affairs practice

The book's unique format and structure are particularly important given its potential use as a professional development resource. Each chapter concludes with a set of discussion questions, which are valuable for readers' personal accountability and growth or for discussions with colleagues. Though the totality of the chapters is stronger when read together, each of the book's chapters could be used as a stand-alone resource to delve into a specific topic as needed or desired. I have often wrestled with the notion that, as student affairs educators, we must contend with the complexities of educating students to engage in dialogue and demonstrate mutual respect around these critical topics, often while simultaneously maintaining relationships with others who do not agree with our perspectives. For this reason, the book acknowledges and showcases how to hold opposing viewpoints in tandem. The book's dialogues also extend to digital environments. Readers can continue learning and engaging on the Contested Issues in Student Affairs platforms on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WordPress.

In terms of supporting orientation, transition, and retention professionals, this book is beneficial in many ways. First and foremost, it challenges readers to consider that students come to college "from a largely homogeneous educational system, with little understanding of our racial history or of root causes of systemic inequality" (p.

6). We welcome them to a space where they will encounter a diversity of identities and perspectives, not stopping to ask ourselves "What could go wrong?" (p. 6). With orientation, transition, and retention professionals on the front lines, this book is a necessary tool to transform their approaches to marketing, programs, institutional strategies, and campus culture. Equally important is a critical consideration of the campus environment upheld or challenged by student affairs educators. As catalysts for creating inclusive learning environments, orientation, transition, and retention professionals have a unique vantage point as key educators guiding students' entrance and transition to campus.

If it was the editors' and authors' wish to leave readers with more questions than answers, they have indeed accomplished their mission. This book introduces readers—graduate students; new professionals; orientation, retention, and transition professionals; and senior scholars—to a landscape of timely and critical issues in higher education. Most importantly, it serves as a launching pad for sustained dialogue and development for student affairs educators to serve students equitably and inclusively and advance our campuses as places of radical transformation.