

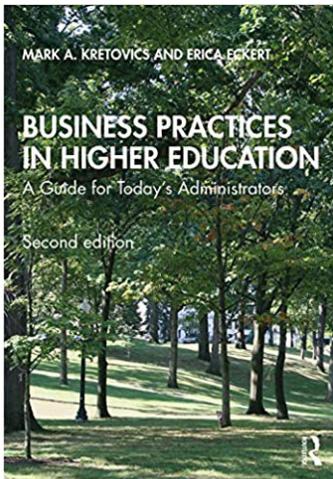
PLANNING

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BOOK REVIEW

Business Practices in Higher Education

A Guide for Today's Administrators



by Mark A. Kretoivics and
Erica Eckert
Routledge Publishing,
New York, New York
10017 2019
300 Pages
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Reviewed by Margaret Plympton

This book fills an important information gap for many new or less experienced administrators, offering a comprehensive look at the various business activities of higher education institutions. The authors include definitions of important words, graphics that demonstrate their approaches and underlying assumptions, occasional editorial judgments regarding the value of current practices, and a general look to the future of higher education business practices.

Overall, they effectively present useful information, taking care to include examples explicitly set in the context of the higher education world, and use language that is approachable by most administrators, even those without years of experience. Although the authors seem to write primarily for student affairs administrators, the book represents an important effort to meet the need for solid analysis for new generations of higher education leadership in all areas.

This review addresses the book's Second Edition, published eight years after the first edition. The current edition has been updated to reflect changes in the intervening years, and the authors introduce new chapters on accounting, strategic planning, and fundraising. Particularly in the financial sections,



it's not clear whether the full scope of the massive impact of the Great Recession on higher education has been taken into account. Most of the references included predate the 2008–2011 downturn, and the ramifications of that decline do not appear to have been fully analyzed.

Section: Environment and Structure

Within the Environment and Structure section of the book, there is a very helpful discussion of what metaphor appropriately captures a student's relationship to the institution. The authors discuss the weaknesses of “student as customer” and “student as product,” and then come down in favor of “student as co-producer” of the educational experience. That then serves as a theme throughout the rest of the book; it's a valuable mental model for administrators.

In the section that speaks to the power of rankings, the authors wisely advocate for not making major institutional decisions to chase an increase in rankings. There is a somewhat mixed message about the role of endowments in the financial health of an institution (as opposed to a tool for increasing rank), but the overall cautionary note about rankings and their risks is valuable.

When it comes to the topic of fundraising, it might have been helpful for the authors to spend a little more time on one of the key differences between private and public institutions, which is the practice at most publicly funded institutions to have a separately incorporated foundation where donations can flow to and from. For administrators who might only have

worked in private institutions, that added complexity could present a challenge not anticipated.

Section: Finance and Funding

The Finance and Funding section takes on a wide variety of complicated topics, and offers valuable vocabulary assistance, as well as providing support for non-financial experts to ascertain the important messages from an institution's financial picture. The authors bring an important focus to the need for higher education institutions to meet the public good, particularly those that are funded by public funds. But additional weight could have been brought to that argument by pointing out that even private non-profit institutions are receiving public funding: They are not paying taxes on their revenues or on the goods and services they purchase. Tax-exempt status is itself a form of public funding—one that only increases the need for institutions to meet a larger purpose for society—in addition to their particular institutional mission.

The demographic patterns for the next generation of high school graduates that are shared in the book are indeed sobering news for institutions that rely primarily on traditional-age students. But as the higher education marketplace grows and changes, there is a valuable reminder for all readers that older students, whether just starting their college experience or returning to complete a degree, are another important enrollment source. It would have been helpful to include in that section the importance of admitting and then *retaining* students.



Overall, the authors' explanations of general budgeting realities are useful for emerging higher education administrators; however, some statements are misleading to the point of inaccuracy.

Finally, within the section, there is the quote: "Many of higher education's problems come from an unwillingness to see institutions as businesses, a cultural intransigence rooted in nostalgia for what the system represented through much of the 20th century." While acknowledging that the quote is from another author (Carlson), it also seems important for the authors to remind readers that higher education as we know it in the United States today started in our country in the 1650s, and was born from a tradition that stretches back to the 1200s in Europe. One person's cultural intransigence is another person's respect for 900 years of tradition. Further, to assert that higher education financing, business practices, and cultural patterns have not changed enormously in the past several decades, to say nothing of the past hundreds of years, seems overly simplistic and without grounding in fact.

Section: People and Processes

The strategic planning section is strong, including the authors making the valuable point that the core goal is not to have a plan, but the planning process itself. And the steps are well described and thought out, as well as the inclusion of the variety of terms that are used in different planning frameworks. The essential message is that each institution needs to decide on which terms it will use.

Section: Perspectives on the Future

The future areas of focus and concern for higher education institutions are well thought out and fully articulated. There will doubtless be readers who wish to add or subtract a point or two, but the broad sweep and variety of issues mentioned definitely do a valuable service in preparing leaders for higher education institution futures.

This book offers a compendium of the range of administrative functions in US colleges and universities and provides an easy-to-read and valuable introduction to each of the applicable areas. Content is strongly grounded with higher education examples. Although there are a few areas that might be expanded or corrected before a next edition, the existence of such a text delivers important support to creating and equipping the next generation of higher education leaders.



Author Biography



MARGARET (PEGGY) PLYMPTON, EDD, is a principal at AGB Search. From 2015–2017, she served as deputy chair/acting chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. She was vice president for finance and administration at Lehigh University and Bucknell University, and held administrative/finance roles at Yale University, Wellesley College, and Harvard University. Plympton holds a BA from Wellesley College, an MBA from Boston University, and an EdD from the University of Pennsylvania.

Engage with the Author

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