

## First Semester Knowledge Review

Xiaohan “Linda” Du

Arkansas Tech University

### First Semester Knowledge Review

As a prospective student affairs practitioner, I start to explore what I need to do and how I can achieve some accomplishments in order to contribute to this career, which not only benefits students in higher education but also other stakeholders, such as parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community. I have lots of expectations for myself in student affairs. I desire to become an international educator, working for international students to help them succeed based on my own successful or unsuccessful background experience. I understand I need to learn different things beyond just the international part to work in student affairs. I need to make sure anything I am learning now is fully understood to set a firm foundation. During my first semester in the College Student Personnel program, I have learned so many things, which totally updates and expands my mind.

Most time in American College Student course has been spent on talking about different types of students. From the first day of class, we discussed different generations on their classification and characteristics. To better work with students now, we need to study and understand them well today. Within different student subgroups, we have discussed generation Z, Native American students, student veterans, adult learners, first-generation students, single mothers, Korean American students, LGBT students, international students, Greek students, student athletes, Muslim students, transfer students, students with disabilities, African American students, and another system of students classification by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) in the book of *Paying for the Party*. There are more types of students that we did not go further, but what I need to keep in mind is that every student is unique and I need to look for the best opportunities for them to succeed as their student affairs practitioner.

As an international student myself, I probably care about knowledge and news related to them most. However, an international student can play lots of other different roles in various student subgroups. One thing from the group presentations that was most impressed to me was presenters said “introducing Greek life to international students is great, but it needs to match their personalities whether they fit in a fraternity or sorority or not”. This idea has grown in my mind because I realize although we are providing all kinds of programs and services we are trying to engage with more students, but I need to be careful that students still need to make their own decisions among all kinds of opportunities on campus. Therefore, when I suggest something to a student, I need to introduce it in a rational way without any personal bias. If students desire to accomplish something, then it is also our responsibilities to assist them. We should understand what students need and how we are going to create a path for them to get there. The recruitment and admission of international students can bring an institution financial support, diverse atmosphere, and lots of benefits. In return, I want to make sure my institution can provide them more advanced services to help them succeed.

Talking about bias and stereotypes, there are more and more minority student groups are getting attention and support. Diversity does not only refer to students with different races, religions, or cultures. It also includes students with all kinds of different backgrounds as mentioned above. With the growing of student identities, a large number of campus clubs and organizations have been expanded to dedicate to specific ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious populations (Levine & Dean, 2012). To function a campus effectively as a whole, intergroup collaboration becomes more and more important. Therefore, it is helpful to reach out and disseminate information about each student subgroup to other groups in order to clear any wrong perceptions and to build a better relationship. It is probably difficult to fully

understand and agree with a minor group, but at least we can learn about them and respect each other.

Another system to classify students was established by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), who researched on a group of female students to see how their social life affected the academic performance and the future career pathway and even marriage status. They identified these students as socialites, wannabes, strivers, achievers, and underachievers. It is useful to study the characteristics of these different groups of students, such as their chosen major, GPA, career prospects, financial situation, and parental support (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). The point in studying those should be to better direct students during their college life. If we could address the profiles of these students' examples to new students, they will be aware of the outcomes linked to which lifestyle they decide now.

Another student subgroup we studied during the class that gave me a huge shock was about former foster youth attending college. The primary purpose of studying these former foster youth was to explore factors on risk and resilience on this group at high risk for developmental failure. A common source of severe adversity for these students was the childhood maltreatment after they lost or were removed from their parents. Once they entered the foster system, they had to face lots of problems, such as identifying themselves, protecting themselves and their siblings, facing the future on their own. All these problems can either fail them into greater depression or train them well to become independent. They also receive some but very limited help from other resources. As the student affairs professionals to help these students, we need to help them with reality problems such as academic struggles, financial and housing issues, and also with psychological adjustment to ensure they are emotionally healthy to move on (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005).

Actually not only this group of students needs to be carefully handled, there are lots of other similar groups of students need extra support from higher education professionals. First-generation and Korean American students were discussed during the class. I was worried about how many of them can really succeed in identifying themselves and start their bright future. Students who lack parental knowledge and support need to have external counseling. If we can provide a mentor service prior to their college life, they may be clearer about what they need to do to succeed. I was a student only focused on academic courses. To save time and graduate earlier, I asked my academic advisor if he could allow me to take over eighteen credit hours per semester. He did not refuse me right away, instead he told me he wanted me to enjoy college life outside of classrooms and to consider about his decision. At that moment, I probably thought he just could not understand my personal needs. While after my freshman year and getting involved in those holistic campus events during my free time, I really appreciated his wise decision to me as a first-time, first-year, and first-generation student. I will remind myself to establish and hold students to high performance expectations outside the classroom that are consistent with student's backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). And the retention and graduation rates for an institution can also benefit from it. Besides, the campus should support and promote minority student organizations in order to create inclusive campus environments (Hoffman & Vallejo Peña, 2013).

All student subgroups discussed above are just a small portion of the whole student bodies. The main idea is to get to know our students so that they can get more effective assistant during their college life. And this is a long-term goal for us to achieve. To achieve this goal also needs collaborations with students, parents, faculty, other staff, alumni, and the community. And this will impact the entire higher education continuously. Student counseling service and student

organizations will be more intentionally developed to aid students through the higher education. Higher education practitioners will need to update student development theory to better perform in this field.

After the first semester in college student personnel program, I have started to explore and to generate my knowledge and skills of student affairs. This career is about life-long pursuing effort and passion. I will keep updating my knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become a good student affairs practitioner along with my passion, experience, and hard work.

## References

- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hines, A. M., Merdinger, J., & Wyatt, P. (2005). Former foster youth attending college: Resilience and the transition to young adulthood. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75, 381-394.
- Hoffman, J., & Vallejo Peña, E. (2013). Too Korean to be White and too White to be Korean: Ethnic identity development among transracial Korean American adoptees. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 50, 152–170.
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Levine, A., & Dean, D. R. (2012). *Generation on a tightrope: A portrait of today's college student*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.