BOOK REVIEW

Restorative Justice on the College Campus: Promoting Student Growth and Responsibility, and Reawakening the Spirit of Campus Community
Edited by David R. Karp, Ph.D. and Thom Allena, M.S.
Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd, Springfield, IL, 2004
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Reviewed by Richard T. Olshak

Restorative Justice on the College Campus examines the strengths and weaknesses of traditional campus disciplinary processes, with the premise that wherever possible, such structures should be supplemented or replaced by restorative justice methods. The book introduces its readers to the concepts of integrity boards, victim/offender reconciliation, and community conferencing. There is also an excellent overview of the history and current state of mediation in the higher education community.

Numerous case studies, which are very balanced, show not only the strengths, but also the limitations of restorative justice techniques. They provide useful techniques and strategies for implementing restorative justice practices. The book is supplemented by excellent analytical sections on topics including alcohol use, Greek life culture, hazing, collegiate athletics, hate crimes and sexual victimization.

The vision of this book will encourage those with traditional views of conduct and discipline to expand their perspective, and to consider concepts that, while taking more time and energy, also offer significantly greater gains for the entire academic community.

Disciplinary officers reading this work, however, may find that the book oversimplifies current student disciplinary practices, and inadequately recognizes significant changes taking place within the field. Many student disciplinary processes have moved in the direction of restorative justice approaches. Disciplinary conferences, negotiated disciplinary agreements and campus mediation programs are far more practical to the academic setting than the general model promoted in the book. The book does not address the political and fiscal realities that impact the development of programs and services in higher education.

The greatest objection of disciplinary officers, however, will likely be the book's stated position that disciplinary systems are generally focused on punishing offenders for their misconduct. The book suggests a transformative approach to replace this punishment mentality, but seems unfounded on two accounts.

First, sanctions that are imposed for misconduct are generally designed to be both educational and developmental. Boyer (Ernest Boyer, Campus Life: In Search of Community, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990) called for a disciplined community, in which "individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good." There is a wealth of information currently being used by disciplinary officers that focuses on the use of sanctions that promote individual growth while upholding the values of the academic community. To suggest that discipline on college and university campuses reflects a model of punishment is unsupported.

Second, the book takes the position that our goal as educators is to provide more than a "tidy campus," and to move past notions that higher education is a privilege, and that college is not a "soft reform school or a treatment center." The fact of the matter is that higher education, while ever more important in American society, is still a privilege. Each academic community must make challenging decisions on how best to support those seeking a degree, and determine how much in terms of resources will be expended on individuals having difficulty conforming to the norms of the institution. The goal of the book's conclusion, while laudable, is not consistent with academic environments subject to greater fiscal challenges than ever before.

A better sense of the ideal institution-student relationship is found in Bickel and Lake's seminal work, The Rights and Responsibilities of the Modern University: Who Assumes the Risks of College Life? (Carolina Academic Press, 1999). In this book, the authors develop and promote the idea of a facilitator university, in which the college or university is "a facilitator of student empowerment and development" and within which "students and universities...are mutually responsible." Bickel and Lake note the facilitator university "desires to be a guide and a source of positive influence but also trusts in the inherent wisdom of students." However, "without consequences, students cannot learn responsibility." To be sure, there is room to incorporate the work of Karp and Allena into this framework, and many commonalities can be found. Practitioners wanting a fuller perspective are well advised to read both works.

These concerns notwithstanding, the book truly is a commendable piece, and is a "must-read" for anyone involved in the resolution of conflict and/or misconduct. It is a solid exploration of its topic, and challenges the reader to find new ways to invest in the well being of students, and thus improve the overall well being of the entire academic community.

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