

## Book Review

### **Wood, L. and Breyer, Y. (eds) (2017) *Success in Higher Education: Transitions to, within and from University***

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How do students in Mumbai choose their academic focus? What pressures are faced by academic staff in Montevideo? How is mathematics being made more accessible in Greenwich? This book provides insights into a diverse range of international case studies focused on promoting student success.

In their introductory chapter, editors Leigh Wood and Yvonne Breyer from Macquarie University (Australia) set out their aim, to:

“examine success in higher education and the role of successful transitions by campus students from Australia and around the globe.”  
(p.2)

This is set within the context of the changing discourse within higher education, from “failure and attrition” to “success and retention” (p.5). The model of student success proposed is based on:

“...sustaining and nurturing personal and professional transitions. Transitions to university, transitions to higher-level thinking and learning and transitions to life after higher education.”  
(p.5)

Moreover, the editors aim to highlight the “small and meaningful changes” which can enhance graduate success (p.2), and to:

“give readers insights into the practical implementation of interventions that have been proven to work in both regional and global contexts.”  
(p12)

The book’s subsequent 20 chapters elaborate case studies, and are broadly structured as individual research papers. Perhaps not surprisingly, almost half of the chapters are written by staff from Macquarie University. Nevertheless, as well as drawing on good practice from their own institution, the editors have compiled contributions from an impressive range of international authors, with each continent represented - including universities in the USA, Uruguay, Bangladesh, South Africa, New Zealand and the UK. Moreover, different perspectives are captured, including chapters written by students (chapter 15), administrators (chapter 21) and career development consultants (chapter 13).

The book is divided into four parts, the first three of which align with the transition model of student success (p.6). Part one, consisting of three chapters, focuses on the transition to

University, with chapters exploring pre-entry strategies, mentoring and finally, a science access program in South Africa.

Part two, with seven chapters, examines transitions within University, including a range of support and assessment strategies. Chapter 8 was particularly noteworthy; it outlined the methods used at Wuhan University in China to help international students overcome barriers to success. Another highlight was chapter 10, which focused on student representatives; while many universities are already using this approach, for readers who are new to the concept, this would be a useful guide.

The theme of the shortest section, part three, is transitions from University, with all three case studies provided by Macquarie University. These comprise work integrated learning, programmes to promote sustainable employability and defining successful transitions to work.

Part four focuses on the complete journey, and is a grouping of chapters which do not align with the first three groupings. The content includes academic literacy support, undergraduate and doctoral student success, and programme design. For me, three chapters in particular stood out. Chapter 18 is an analysis of the decision-making mechanisms behind the academic choices of students in Mumbai University, linked to their conceptions of success. This theme provides fascinating insights into Indian culture and education, and perhaps more universal insights into the impact of gender and family on choices made. Chapter 19 explains the establishment of a private University in Bangladesh, and while it does not align with the approach of the other chapters, it is nevertheless illuminating. The chapter charts the University's journey from its beginnings in 1996 with 20 students in a rented building on a bumpy road surrounded by rickshaw garages, while the Vice Chancellor, Registrar and Treasurer provided their services free of charge, to 2014 when the University had its own campus and had admitted over 28,000 students in 18 years. Meanwhile, chapter 20 elaborates some of the issues and dilemmas faced by academic staff at Montevideo University (Uruguay). Both of the latter accounts put the challenges of my own career in higher education into perspective.

This text would work particularly well for the "dipper", who seeks to pick out pertinent sections rather than necessarily read the whole text. The chapter headings are relatively transparent, and the short abstract at the start of each chapter provides a clear summary. Hence, the practitioner seeking to enhance the experience of their students could quickly identify which chapters are of professional relevance. Some of the strategies outlined may well already be familiar, however, the theoretical underpinning is valuable to help explain the rationale for existing practice. For example, chapter 16 provides a model to explain the combination of generic and embedded approaches used by many University services (in this case, academic literacy support) and chapter 17 focuses on the constructively aligned curriculum. For the more thorough reader who prefers to read from beginning to end, there is a loose structure to the book, although each chapter is written independently without cross referencing. The lack of a final summary chapter means that the narrative does come to a somewhat abrupt end.

Overall the combination of theory and practice elaborated within this text is likely to appeal to a broad range of international readers. The perspectives from various countries, and professional and discipline areas, are illuminating and illustrate that there is a great deal we can continue to learn from each other.