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# Understanding Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities: A Comprehensive Resource, edited by Sandra Estanek

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The text is challenging, especially the insight into the connections between social justice and spirituality and sexuality and spirituality. The community as the Body of Christ is not groundbreaking, but Rolheiser's insistence on its central importance, especially its role in reconciliation may unnerve some. The human foibles of the Church – sexual abuse by priests and its subsequent mishandling by the hierarchy, a lack of pastoral care in enormous parishes, and incomplete or incoherent catechetical education for its members – are never whitewashed or glossed over; however, the part these faults play in the spiritual distance many Catholics feel with their Church could have been better addressed. These criticisms aside, *The Holy Longing* is an excellent work of faith, scholarship, and storytelling. It is not a memoir, step-by-step reflection guide, or a theological treatise, but it is a clear articulation of the connection between God and the deepest longings human beings innately possess.

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## **UNDERSTANDING STUDENT AFFAIRS AT CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE**

SANDRA M. ESTANEK, ED.  
SHEED & WARD, 2002  
\$24.95, 208 pages

*Reviewed by Michael P. Fierro*

During a senior writing seminar at the University of Notre Dame, a discussion began about whose job was most important: the president of a university, a department chair, a faculty member, a trustee, or a maintenance worker. One student remarked that naturally a president's job was more important because he or she directs the operations of the university. Another student believed the faculty members were the most important because they provid-

ed the students with the academic objectives outlined in the school's mission. One student remarked that all of those jobs were equally important; none could be removed from the structure of a university because each has a particular purpose. While reading Sandra M. Estanek's resource book for individuals who have devoted their time and energy to working with students at the collegiate level, this discussion came to mind.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic constitution directed toward Catholic colleges and universities throughout the world. His intent was to further steer higher education in the light of Catholic teachings and traditions. This constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, was the subject of much discussion in the United States, where the protected concept of academic freedom was vital to a school's success. The majority of the dialogue occurred between a school's president, board of governance, department chairpersons, faculty members, and the local bishop. Estanek collaborates with different individuals who work in the area of student affairs and discusses their role in ensuring Catholic teachings are carried into student life. Throughout the book, the writers clearly state that school administrators have an equal role in fulfilling the mission of the college or university. Richard P. Salmi, S.J., Vice-President for Student Affairs at John Carroll University, states that student affairs personnel "are partners in the mission of our universities and in the mission in the Church to prepare men and women to live lives that proclaim the love of God and love of neighbor" (p. 16).

Estanek structures the book into two sections that allow people who work in student affairs to better understand their role in implementing *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. The first section deals with a collection of thoughts and reflections on how the administrator's role is pivotal in ensuring that student life, outside the classroom, responds to a changing society while remaining true to Catholic teachings. The second section provides six case studies that may serve as a resource for Catholic college and university personnel in developing Catholic value-based policies and programs.

In "Student Development and the Catholic University: Philosophical Reflections," Estanek discusses four scenarios that are true of larger schools. First, she begins with a group of students who wish to show a screening of a controversial film and hold a student discussion regarding the producer. A student organization petitions the administration claiming that this screening contradicts the Catholic mission of the university. Second, she discusses the sensitive issue of allowing the formal recognition of a gay and lesbian student organization. Next, she dialogues about a policy that would allow female students who have a pre-existing medical condition to purchase birth control pills on campus. Finally, she talks about maintaining male-female visitations, while not promoting sexual intimacy. These are realistic cases that present realistic problems and require thoughtful solutions. Estanek

explains, "Sometimes the clash is between the values of the Catholic tradition and the values and perspectives of one of the professions represented on campus" (p. 18).

Rev. Robert M. Friday, Vice-President for Student Life at The Catholic University of America, helps readers understand that the Church's moral tradition stems from Scripture and natural law. This provides Catholic colleges and universities with the ability to preserve policies on the principles of the Catholic Church. Friday goes further to explain how students come to campus with a developed conscience. It is the role of the student affairs administrators, residence hall directors, campus ministers, or other student affairs staff to reinforce positive values and challenge negative values.

As executive secretary of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Dolores L. Christie takes a deeply spiritual approach to the role of student affairs in the formation of a student's conscience. In her conclusion, she writes, "The formation of a conscience is a process that demands that each person is loved and accepted, but also challenges to grow and to appreciate new values" (p. 95). She makes a final connection between those that work with students and the promise of baptism in how professionals are called to be Christ for those who are troubled in a society of mixed messages.

The second-half of the book provides concrete examples of how different colleges and universities have implemented studies and research helping student affairs departments further define their purpose, role, and most importantly, their Catholic identity in the educational structure of the school.

Andrew J. Hill, of St. Mary's University, Texas, explained that before one could pursue a study to identify ways to improve the role of student affairs, one must step back and understand the history and identity of the institution. Further, one cannot end this discussion with a report or analysis, but rather continue the discussion integrating findings into all parts of the university. In this particular case study, Hill incorporates the role of the Society of Mary in the foundation of the identity of their Catholic university. In times when the number of vowed religious found on campuses continues to decline, this case study reiterates the importance of their presence and ministry.

One of the most challenging areas of the Catholic Church and higher education today is building a campus that embraces diversity while maintaining traditional values and beliefs. Deborah L. Ford of Spalding University addresses this critical area by outlining a process to become more inclusive for all members of the community. First, Ford describes a motivation of the student affairs staff to assess the needs of the students in all areas of the school, including student activities, residence life, campus ministry, career services, and student programs. Once the staff understands the needs of its students, it implements programs and services that address the diversity of its members through different means and services. Two other areas of

university life that Ford addresses are service learning and character formation. These two activities help further the goal of diversity and put classroom theory into practice, fulfilling the school's mission statement.

Overall, this reviewer would highly recommend this resource book for anyone who has accepted the vocation of working with college students. As emphasized in the text, the role of student affairs staff is integral in the execution of the school's mission statement and beliefs. More importantly, the role of the student affairs staff complements that of their academic colleagues. Most would agree that a student's education inside the classroom is of equal value to the education one gains in the residence hall, student center, athletic arena, or retreat service.

This reviewer would also take this recommendation further and suggest that student activities offices at Catholic colleges and universities provide this book as a reference material for their student leaders. This opportunity would allow students directly working with the school's administration for change, to see the perspective, responsibility, and accountability of student affairs personnel to align all activities with the overarching school mission.

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## **WHAT GREAT PRINCIPALS DO DIFFERENTLY: FIFTEEN THINGS THAT MATTER MOST**

TODD WHITAKER  
EYE ON EDUCATION, INC., 2003  
\$29.95, 117 pages

*Reviewed by M. Josepha Van Camp*

Principals who seek to improve their schools, will find the book *What Great Principals Do Differently: Fifteen Things That Matter Most* empowering. Whitaker, a former principal who works with more than 50 schools each