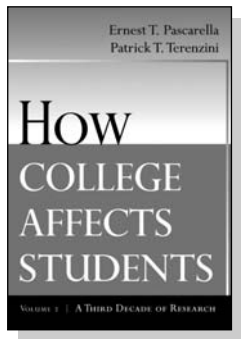


Book Reviews

Subhead to come.



How College Affects Students, Volume 2: A third decade of research (2005)

by Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini
Jossey-Bass, 2005
827 pages
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Reviewed by Simone Himbeault Taylor

Introduction

Although books are often reviewed at or near point of publication some volumes can benefit from having the opportunity to spend some time “in the wild” to see how they fair in practice. The latest compilation of research produced by Pascarella and Terenzini is one such volume as I have had over two years to experience its value as an aid to research, teaching, and practice. I have utilized this volume both in my administrative and faculty capacities and have encouraged staff and students to tap it as well. Thus, I can speak not only conceptually about this reference text but also to its utility.

This volume immediately joins other classics that have earned their place on the bookshelf of any scholar and practitioner of the college student experience. As with the best of these, each offers essential frameworks for understanding the student experience and the ways in which colleges influence that experience, and each provides analyses and syntheses of theories, concepts, models, and research related to this topic.

Historical Context

To fully appreciate volume 2, a bit of historical perspective is beneficial. Pascarella and Terenzini themselves are highly respectful of the precedent for a comprehensive review of existing research. Their first volume served as a much-needed follow-up to Feldman and Newcomb’s 1969 review of four decades of research covering over 1500 studies. Indeed, their 1991 volume included a foreward by Kenneth Feldman that served to symbolically pass the baton to this next generation of respected colleagues. In that foreward, Feldman wrote:

More than ever before, we now know how students change at college and understand why they change as they do. At the same time, we are also more aware of *exactly* what we do *not* know about college impacts on students and of

precisely what gaps in knowledge need filling in. With respect, then, to the influence on students that colleges do have and could have, the present book helps set the research and policy agenda for this, the last decade of the twentieth century (p. xiii).

Pascarella and Terenzini’s 1991 volume covered over 2600 studies from 1967-1989, approximately two decades. While the authors now refer to this first volume as “dated scholarship,” I have a somewhat different interpretation: volume 1, along with the 1969 Feldman and Newcomb, provides an extraordinary 60 year context for the research that follows. They are the threads that create the foundations for what is understood about the student college experience. This 2005 volume 2 reviews the approximately 2500 studies that have been conducted over only the past decade (approximately 1989-2002). Like the knowledge explosion occurring in so many other fields, the growth of research in the field of student development and college impact is impressive and substantial. At this rate, we should anticipate a volume 3 of similar size (827 pages) in five years! And because of this explosion of new research, the need for analysis and synthesis of pertinent studies is all the more needed as an essential

service to the profession, for scholars and practitioners alike.

The exponential growth of studies, however, is only part of the story. Little could Feldman have anticipated in 1991 that at the same time we were gaining a fuller understanding of how and why students changed in college that the very students being studied were shifting dramatically. The past decade or so has brought with it greater awareness of the many student populations that make up today's collective student body. Unlike the many theories and studies in Feldman and Newcomb's volume that represented the experiences of predominantly white males attending traditional institutions of higher education, the 2005 volume 2 sheds light on a wide array of student social identities, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

At the same time the student population was recognized as being increasingly diverse, the profile of college types themselves had also expanded to include traditional modes of higher education, the growing role of community colleges, emerging technologies providing for distance education, and the evolution of the for-profit college enterprise. And finally, the research methodologies for studying students and institutions also expanded over the decades. More sophisticated data modeling techniques provide for in-depth quantitative analyses; qualitative studies have gained greater rigor and, as a result, greater respect as legitimate research; and more naturalistic and ethnographic methods borrowed from anthropology are also influencing research about college students. In sum, the growing complexity of students, higher education

settings, and the tools for understanding them both has opened the door for scholarship well-beyond what might have been imagined by Feldman and Newcomb as they sought to capture the first forty years of this field of study...or even by Pascarella and Terenzini when publishing their first volume. It is within this increasing complex context that Pascarella and Terenzini published this second impressive volume.

A Tour of Volume 2

Beyond this historical contextualization, volume 2 was designed to be a companion volume to volume 1 and, as such, it parallels many aspects of the first volume.

The book is organized like a well-conceived research project. This includes sharing how the authors' inquiry was organized, the theoretical framework(s), findings/results, and implications for future efforts. More specifically, the volume is broken down as follows:

- Chapter 1: Discussion of approach to conduct research on research; highlights of differences in literature since first volume; and a discussion of definitions and notions of evidence
- Chapter 2: Theoretical underpinnings of student development and college impact; presentation of new conceptual models that inform college impact research including the value of considering psychological and sociological points of view
- Chapters 3-9: Each chapter is dedicated to a particular college outcome for individual students. These include:

- Verbal, quantitative, and subject matter competence; cognitive skills and intellectual growth; psychosocial change; attitudes and values; moral development; educational attainment and persistence; and career and economic impact

- Chapter 10: Long-term impact of college
- Chapters 11-12: Comparative analyses of themes, variations, and differences from first volume, and in what ways research findings reflect the theories and models delineated in chapter 2. The final chapter addresses implications for research, practice, and policy
- References and indexes: 176 pages of references followed by name and subject indexes
- The end of each chapter includes an extensive notes section.

Within each chapter, the structure is well organized. The literature on each outcome is analyzed through the lens of six pivotal questions (as applicable—the structure is not forced but employed to provide order). These questions parallel those utilized for the analysis of the literature in the first volume and are as follows:

- What evidence is there that individuals change during the time in which they are attending college?
- What evidence is there that change or development during college is the result of college attendance?
- What evidence is there that different kinds of postsecondary institutions have a differential

influence on student change or development during college?

- What evidence exists on effects of different experiences in the same institution?
- What evidence is there that the collegiate experience produces conditional, as opposed to general, effects on student change or development?
- What are the long-term effects of college?

In volume 2, each of these questions within the chapters leads with a summary of findings that emerged from volume 1. This provides a context for how new findings described in the new volume either further support or challenge existing knowledge.

First, the Critique

Like any good research project, the first chapter describes the methodology for the analysis of the research studies and defines terms. The authors employ an approach that includes, but is distinct from, meta-analysis in order to allow for the wide range of studies and approaches (by outcome type, by quantitative or qualitative methodology, by sample size, by within or between institution, for example) and still derive some conclusions that inform the nature of effect. Given the great variability that exists across studies of seemingly similar constructs, this well-considered methodology accounting for differences in approach is useful.

The chapter on theoretical underpinnings showcases how some of the greatest movement in the study of college students during the past decade has been in how we conceptualize students and their

experiences. Yet, of all the chapters, I believe this one could have benefited from some reconceptualization and substantial expansion in order to be of even greater utility. The authors circumscribe their scope to cover theory insofar as it informs our understanding of college impact; the chapter is neither designed nor intended to substitute for a comprehensive volume on college student learning and development theory. In future volumes, I would hope the authors would reconsider this decision. A deeper exploration of theory would not only complement the research that occupies the remainder of the volume but would situate those research findings within a richer context. It would allow this effort to fully live into the comprehensive contribution it has the potential to be.

For example, the section on developmental theories is notable in its expansion from the first volume by giving attention to social identity development, including gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Meaningful as this addition is, it also makes evident the absence of populations that remain within the margins of higher education. The authors consider gender but omit transgender; they address race but not multi-racial identities; they give a nod to older students but indicate that a review of adult development literature is beyond the scope of the chapter (p. 18); and they are essentially silent regarding models considering negotiation within and across identities. One needs to refer to the notes section at the back of the chapter for a hint at these perspectives but I would suggest that the footnotes need to be brought forward as *this* is the current salient dialogue in the

study of college students. The authors acknowledge that they have focused on the dominant theories but is it not the very role of such a volume, addressing the most current thinking in this field, to give attention to new knowledge that is emerging? We need references to emerging models as tools to conceptualize a more complex student population. Silence suggests absence and thus we do not fully benefit from what is known. Similar critique could be proffered regarding the other sections of this chapter where this reader is left wanting more.

Along these same lines, Pascarella and Terenzini may have considered addressing key emerging frameworks in this chapter that complement theory and inform work with, and research about, students. For example, presenting a social justice framework would contextualize the findings reported regarding social identity development, intergroup relations, and global citizenship outcomes, to name but a few. A social justice framework has become an essential schema for guiding our work with students and yet cannot be found in the index. This is less a criticism of this volume and more of a call for those who work with and study students to challenge ourselves to go beyond the traditional and dominant paradigms. Educators are keenly aware that the framing of our questions influences the possibility of our answers. Because Pascarella and Terenzini engage in such thorough and thoughtful analyses, as a consumer of their good work I wish they would take into account the most comprehensive and cutting-edge frameworks currently available to us.

That notwithstanding, the six questions utilized to frame the

outcomes chapters are fundamental and speak to the very core of our collective work. The reader may gain a fuller understanding of what is known about change, net effects, between-college effects, within-college effects, conditional, and long-term effects of college for core outcomes. The actual findings from the analysis and synthesis demonstrate that we know so much more than we ever have before... and have so much yet to learn and understand.

Structurally, modifications between volumes 1 and 2 include collapsing the two psychosocial change chapters into one and merging the chapters on career issues and economic impacts. While some might argue with a student outcomes framework or with the selected outcomes themselves, the value of maintaining parallel construction across the two volumes cannot be dismissed and reflects a user-centered perspective. And, within the national climate of attention to outcomes at the federal, state, and professional association level, such an outcomes framework allows the authors to demonstrate that this is a complex question requiring sophisticated inquiry and non-simplistic responses. This is an important message to those that would reduce the mission of higher education to a few tangible and highly utilitarian ends.

Substantively, modifications to volume 2 include offering a summary of findings from the first volume as part of each outcomes chapter. Thus, the second volume does not simply *add on* to the first by introducing yet another decade of research but *adds value* by directly referencing summary findings from the 1991 volume. While other approaches could have been

employed, Pascarella and Terenzini have applied structure and discipline that bring order and meaning to what is known about the college student experience. The quality of their analyses—and the rigor they bring to it—is as good as the best of the studies they reviewed. And, from a content standpoint, there is simply more of everything here: more studies, more outcomes, and more affirmation of findings going back to the Feldman and Newcomb days—indeed, the current findings provide greater depth to the initial research findings. Again, because framework matters, one is only left wanting great context that might have been gained through a more comprehensive theoretical filter capturing more voices.

If the content/outcomes chapters have delineated the “what” of current research, chapters 11-12 deliver the “so what” of the collective findings. These are the chapters that bring it all together for researchers, students, and practitioners. While reference texts are rarely read cover to cover—or designed to be utilized in that fashion—these chapters are well worth reading fully, highlighting, and revisiting on a regular basis for the reader seeking an excellent overview. The reference list and name and subject indexes are excellent resources.

And Now, the Testimonial

This reference work offers tremendous potential for informing the work of anyone concerned with students. Examples include but are not limited to use:

- for framing our efforts regardless of our roles in the higher education enterprise, whether student affairs professionals, institutional

planners, facilities managers, or the president

- in policy making, for administrators to manage by fact
- for informing the public, whether parents, consumers, and/or legislators
- in practice, for direct service deliverers to design intentional educational interventions to affect learning and development
- in class, for MA and PhD students to launch literature reviews
- in research, to ground inquiry in existing theory, models, and research.

I offer only one caution, not intended as a criticism of the text proper but, rather, how it could be misused. This volume is so thorough that there is the risk of confusing the reference text for the original source. I have observed that this happens regularly, early-on in the graduate courses I teach. Students need to be reminded that Pascarella and Terenzini is the source that leads you to the other sources, not the original source itself. The excellent work provided by the authors often makes this argument difficult as their own interpretations are so insightful but, in the end, original scholarship needs to rely on making meaning from original sources... just like Pascarella and Terenzini have so ably done in volume 2.

Dey and Hurtado (1995) described an ecological model that acknowledges that at the same time college impacts students, students impact college. With the enhanced knowledge we possess through increasingly substantial and substantive research, we see tangible evidence that this knowledge impacts institutional practice. This informed practice, in turn, transforms