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Book review:

Dziekanaty na wyższych uczelniach: funkcjonowanie, wyzwania, dobre praktyki [Dean's offices at universities: functioning, challenges, best practices]

Reviewed by Diana Krysińska



Dziekanaty na wyższych uczelniach: funkcjonowanie, wyzwania, dobre praktyki [Dean's offices at universities: functioning, challenges, best practices] by Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, Jakub Brdulak, Michał Matuszewicz, Irena Senator (eds), Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2018, 218 pp., ISBN 978-83-8030-219-8 (pbk)

‘Changing roles of staff in administrative support positions within higher education coincides with a call for all institutions to create and sustain holistic learning environments, where everyone contributes to student learning and development.’¹

Management of higher education institutions (HEI) is a well-researched field. That being said, very little has been written about it in Poland or in the broader region of Central and Eastern Europe; cer-

1 S. J. Armstrong Ash, *Student affairs support staff: Empowered and invisible*, Washington State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013, p. V.

tainly, exceptions exist². In this way, questions and issues pertinent to the process and individuals managing student affairs and offering administrative support at HEI have been largely absent from the debate. If these questions were addressed at all, they were mentioned in passing³, usually in relation to the broader question of financial management and customer relations⁴. This situation is somewhat surprising given the fact that efficient administrative support has been identified in the literature⁵ as one of the key factors influencing quality of education and the image of HEIs. Considering the above, the book reviewed here constitutes a very timely and very much needed addition to the debate in that it fills the gaps.

The objective of the book is both to open a new avenue of HEI management research and to establish a community of practice, consisting not only of researchers but also of people directly involved and responsible for managing student affairs at HEI on a daily basis. The volume reviewed here is divided into three parts. In the first five chapters the conceptual and methodological of the book are outlined. In this context, the institutional structure behind the process of managing student affairs at HEI is examined. Specifically, Chapter 1 provides a methodological overview of the existing research as well as elaborates on popular perceptions of 'dean's offices' and their work. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska examines the media discourse on the work of dean's offices and recognizes the need for further research in

- 2 K. Górak-Sosnowska, 'Innovation in Dean's Office: the case of Polish HEIs', in: A. Visvizi and M. D. Lytras, L. Daniela (eds), *The Future of Innovation and Technology in Education: Policies and Practices for Teaching and Learning Excellence* [Emerald studies in higher education, innovation and technology], Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2018, pp. 285-296.
- 3 T. Wawak, *Jakość zarządzania w szkołach wyższych* [Quality of management in higher education institutions], Kraków: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2012, pp. 188-201.
- 4 J. Krzywkowska, 'Profesjonalna obsługa klienta jako źródło przewagi konkurencyjnej w uczelni niepublicznej' [Professional customer service as a source of competitive advantage in a non-public HEI], in: M. Geryk, *Strategia zarządzania uczelniami niepublicznymi w kontekście społecznej odpowiedzialności* [Management strategy of a non-public HEI in the context of social responsibility], Gdańsk-Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania w Gdańsku & Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Inżynierii i Zdrowia w Warszawie, 2009, pp. 52-53.
- 5 A. Pabian, 'Jakość obsługi studentów w szkołach wyższych' [Quality of student service quality in higher education institutions], *Nauka i Szkolnictwo Wyższe*, 1/17/2001, Centrum Badań Polityki Naukowej Szkolnictwa Wyższego Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 179-180; R. P. Keeling (ed.), *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*, Report, Washington, D.C.: American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel, 2004, pp. 11, 24-25.

the area. In Chapter 2, Jakub Brdulak outlines the main challenges related to the process of making the human resources management in dean's offices more efficient. In this context, by emphasizing the notion of 'cultural dissonance' between the primary and the supportive units at the HEI, a discussion on the effectiveness and motivation of the professional personnel responsible for student affairs and administrative support unfolds.

In Chapter 3, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska and Michał Matuszewicz examine the idea of effectiveness in the area of student administrative support and discuss whether or not the student should be treated as a client of the university. Implicitly, by linking the imperative of evaluating quality of education at HEI and service quality at dean's offices, the authors align their discussion with a still nascent debate on key performance indicators in HE and HEI⁶. Indeed, in the following chapter, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska examines systems and methods of 'dean's offices' evaluation at Polish HEI. The author determines five key areas of the functioning of the 'dean's offices' to showcase inconsistencies and flaws in the methodology of the evaluation procedures; best practices are highlighted too. In a similar manner, in Chapter 5, Michał Matuszewicz discusses three models of units responsible for administrative tasks and student's affairs management at Polish HEIs. The weaknesses and strengths of each model are discussed. It remains an open question which the optimal model is.

In the second part of the volume, Chapters 6, 7, 8, the results of in-depth interviews with heads of administrative units conducted in 31 'dean's offices' are discussed. The analysis of the interviews allows the authors to identify a wide range of processes and tasks conducted by 'dean's offices' at HEIs and, then, to map these offices in line with the typology devised in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska and Irena Senator examine ways of innovating the work in dean's offices and making it more efficient. Chapter 8 is devoted to the study of the relations between dean's offices and other administrative units at HEIs and their impact on overall motivation and growth

6 M. D. Lytras and N. R. Aljohani, A. Visvizi, P. Ordonez De Pablos, D. Gasevic, 'Advanced decision-making in higher education: learning analytics research and key performance indicators', *Behaviour & Information Technology*, vol. 37, no. 10-11, 2018, pp. 937-940, DOI: 10.1080/0144929X.2018.1512940.

possibilities of a given HEI. The final part of the book presents the results of the first Convention of Polish Dean's Offices.

The volume is unique both with regards to the selection of the topic and methodological approach to the question of managing students' affairs at HEI. The imperative of building a community of practice that this book entails is one of a kind in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. As such it is in line with similar trends unfolding in the US. The latter led to the establishment of the American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel. The functioning of these associations resulted, on the one hand, in a change of approach to student learning, and, on the other hand, in the role and status of personnel responsible for student affairs and administrative support at HEI. Considering the HE reform taking place in Poland now, the special role HEIs played in the processes of democratization following the collapse of communism in the region⁷, as well HEIs role vis-à-vis sustainable and inclusive growth⁸, questions of management strategies and their impact on enhancing teaching and learning excellence at HEIs ought to be discussed at length. The volume reviewed here does just that.

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7 A. Pausits and A. Pellert (eds), *Higher education management and development in Central, Southern and Eastern Europe*, Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2007, p. 12.

8 A. Visvizi and M. D. Lytras, L. Daniela, 'Education, Innovation and the Prospect of Sustainable Growth and Development', in: A. Visvizi and M. D. Lytras, L. Daniela (eds), *The Future of Innovation and Technology in Education: Policies and Practices for Teaching and Learning Excellence* [Emerald studies in higher education, innovation and technology], Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2018, pp. 297-305, DOI:10.1108/978-1-78756-555-520181015.

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