# Book Review: Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: The Evolution of a Movement Sheth S.L. & Tremblay C.W. (Eds.). (2019). Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: The Evolution of a Movement. Kindle Direct Publishing.

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# Book Review:
## Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: The Evolution of a Movement

Reviewed by
Jennifer Spirer (*Carnegie Mellon University*)

It is Sunday morning and in just minutes you're expecting 250 students and their parents to arrive for six weeks of what you hope will be a transformational experience! The day is filled with check-ins, orientations, campus tours and tearful good-byes. This is what all pre-college professionals experience as their months of hard work come to life with a cacophonous group of students and parents anxiously arriving for the pre-college program.

But what does it take to execute the perfect program? And is there such a thing? The short answer is, it's complicated. And, it depends on who you ask. In their book, *Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: The Evolution of a Movement*, editors Sheth and Tremblay demystify what it takes to build and sustain a successful pre-college program or experience. With the help of 14 industry experts, this collection lays out common definitions and offers simple strategies and key components about what comprises a successful pre-college program.

Having spent the last 11 years of my professional career navigating the evolving pre-college landscape, it is no surprise that a group of my esteemed peers embarked on writing a book of this kind. While they ultimately identified that more research and data are needed (Sheth & Tremblay, 2019), this endeavor lays a solid foundation. From outlining the history and underlying research of pre-college, to showcasing a newly created experience at Brandeis University—Queer Academics and Activism (p. 149), this book is designed to walk the reader through the many nuances and intricacies of pre-college program development in an easy and understandable way.

### A Solid Foundation from which to Build a Future

Sheth and Tremblay make the case that "Pre-college programs are a natural fit to the evolving enhancement of a college's enrollment pipeline" (p. 179). In their final chapter, *Recommendations and Implications for the Future*, Sheth and Tremblay identify the following next steps and areas of focus to consider. I agree this is what will take the conversation to the next level.

1. **Continued growth and development**; there is more work to do and the interest for these types of programs in growing (179).
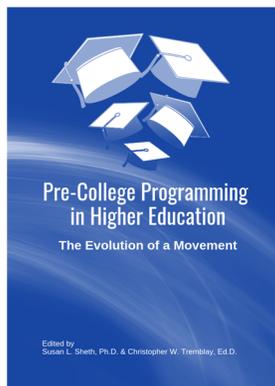
2. **Professionalization of the pre-college programming field**; there is a need for leaders in the field to come together to share best practices and create guidelines to ensure programs are held to the required standards ensuring safety and quality education for all (179).

3. **Strategic enrollment management (SEM) practices**; there is an increasing effort to align pre-college work with university-wide enrollment management. More data is needed here to determine trends (180).

4. **Centralization of pre-college programs**; with the proliferation of programs on campuses it is becoming less feasible for individual departments and/or faculty to manage on their own. It is becoming increasingly important to leverage the expertise that exists on campus (180).

5. **Focus on compliance**; as schools are continuing to build programs and offices devoted to the protection of minors on campus, programs will need to work collaboratively with these offices to ensure the safe treatment of minors as well as to protect themselves from any of the challenges that come with hosting minors on a college campus (181).

6. **Emphasis on 21st-century skills**; rather than focusing on a particular subject or topic, programs are moving toward skill-based programing such as leadership, critical thinking, or information literacy (181).

7. **Dimensions as best practices**; this is the assessment framework recommended industry-wide to create effective programs (182).

8. **Continued commitment to access and inclusion**; there is an opportunity to continue to mirror the higher education landscape and focus on particular underserved populations of students (182).

9. **Gathering more data on Generation "Alpha"**; as programs of these types grow, it's important to understand the audience and establish programs that support their interests and needs and that deliver information in a way that works with their learning style (182).

10. **Increase of internal and external partners**; in addition to developing relationships within campus communities as noted above, it will be important to find creative partnerships to help fund these types of programs and add an additional layer of support (183).

11. **Broadening the age focus**; in today's selective college environment it will be imperative to meet students at all levels of K-12, not just high school students, in order to support their growth through these types of programs from an early age (183-4).

12. **Need for more research**; with more understanding comes better results. As the field grows and research continues, programs will continue to improve (184).

# Pre-College Programming

## About the Contributors
In order to reach these ideals, the authors have compiled a guide that spans the beginnings of research and development and takes the reader through to the implementation of creating a pre-college program by merging theory and practice. Sheth and Tremblay's calls for future action will ensure continued evolution.

Sheth and Tremblay (2019) assembled a diverse and knowledgeable group of higher education professionals who have each found their own way to build programs with intention, based on the best research they could find. These practitioners most likely pulled from general higher education theory and practice.  The 16 authors represent a variety of institution types and share their individual piece of the puzzle to create a complete picture for the reader.

## Planning, Flexibility and Continuous Improvement
Higher education often creates opportunities for professionals at all levels of experience and backgrounds to engage in work across the university, but pre-college programs tend to take this unusual pathway to extremes. I believe that the range of job titles across the book's contributors is representative of the diverse and varied backgrounds and approaches involved in creating successful and engaging pre-college programs.

In Chapter 4, *Starting a Pre-college Program or Office*, we are reminded by Dr. Newcomb of Harvard University that while that there are typical components to consider, in the end "a multi-faceted and comprehensive analysis should be conducted before beginning any program" (Sheth & Tremblay, 2019, p. 48). Short-term gains may outweigh the ability to put a plan of this type into place. Intentional planning makes all the difference.

Chapter 7, *Pre-college Programming as Enrollment,* continues to point to the importance of determining the program's purpose and creating a plan, while adding a few additional planning elements to the mix, particularly marketing and alignment with undergraduate admissions goals and strategic enrollment management. The authors from The School of the New York Times have identified one of the biggest opportunities, in my opinion, in the future of pre-college programs. The idea of building a pipeline that leverages university strengths to support all types of students, simultaneously allowing them to join the pipeline toward an educated future. The legacy of the establishment of the federally funded "TRIO" programs of the 1960's (Edwards, p. 19) is the continued creation of new opportunities to engage and support students for a better educational outcome. This goal is important and has been around for over 50 years.

Co-authors Susie Sheldon Rush and William Alba dive into their experiences at Carnegie Mellon University to affirm the theoretical framework they've uncovered to ensure educational growth on the part of both the students and the staff. They encourage

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readers to analyze their own programs through this experiential lens to ensure continued enhanced learning and to reflect in order to find areas of improvement (Sheth & Tremblay, 2019).

## Concluding Thoughts

This is the first book of its kind that weaves educational theory with hands-on practical experience. For this reason, it is tremendously important to the industry. Simply gathering experts in this area for discussion and collaboration is often challenging. The general themes outlined here establish a foundation for which to delve more deeply. Simultaneously, each individual author brings a fresh approach to the topic. It is clear, even in this collection, that different authors look at the same question or topic through a different lens. Over time it will be important to understand to celebrate these differences yet hold onto the commonalities in order to find new, creative ways to grow. Now that mainstream categorization exists, organizations such as the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) and the Association for Pre-College Programs, industry professionals are able to begin to research and collect data over time. This ability will allow further determination of best practices and outcomes-focused opportunities that are scalable, reproducible, and grounded in fact.

For every pre-college program, there is a theory, process, and administration that follows. For so many years, staff worked in isolation, developing and launching what they believed to be the best version of a pre-college program. This resulted in varied and individual ways to create and run programs. This book is similar to this model in that, for each higher education professional in the book, there is a definition and model that they are following. In some areas, the book reads as a collection of chapters, rather than a cohesive narrative from start to finish. For me, this simply illustrates the many great ideas out there and the need for some order. Sheth and Tremblay are just getting started and there is a long way to go, the information in this book shows great work is happening that impacts young students. JCA

## Reference

Sheth, S.L. & Tremblay, C.W. (Eds.). (2019). *Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: The Evolution of a Movement.* Kindle Direct Publishing.