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Book Review: Pre-College Programming in Higher Education Case Studies

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Pre-College Programming in Higher Education: Case Studies, edited and with contributions from Susan L. Sheth and Christopher W. Tremblay, is an important contribution to the field of higher education. This is the third book since 2019 by these authors focused on pre-college programs, an area that is understudied and currently has a limited literature base. This ambitious volume highlights cases from seven institutions and two organizations that operate in the pre-college environment. Using a case study method with contributions from across the landscape provides an important level of depth in describing these diverse, complex and important programs. The authors set out to develop a practitioner-focused approach for anyone leading or starting a program by offering practical information, effective practices and tips to achieve their program outcome.

The primary content of the book are the nine case studies authored by pre-college program directors across the United States from the following institutions and organizations: Academically Talented Youth Program (ATYP) at Western Michigan University, Pre-College Scholars at University of California, Berkeley, Pre-College Program at Harvard University, Pre-Med Ed at Michigan State University, Summer Academy at UGA at University of Georgia, Summer College Immersion Program (SCIP) at Georgetown University, Yale Young Global Scholars (YYGS) at Yale University, CampDoc, and the Higher Education Protection Network (HEPNet).

The book starts with an introduction, a description of the case study format, and a section that defines language in the pre-college programming environment. Following each case is a table that provides a snapshot of the program including the following key information: Title of the Pre-College program, website link, history of the program, program fee, length, application required, admissions process, annual budget, modality, credit or non-credit, time of year, funding sources, average number of participants, location of the pre-college program in the university structure, program description, staff, target audience, goals, learning outcomes, university
Book Review: Pre-College Programming Case Studies

involvement, best practices, unique features, advice for other pre-college programs, and their program dream/wish. The book ends with a reprinted chapter from an earlier book sharing the 25 dimensions of Pre-College Programming and each case ends by highlighting which dimensions are most present in their case. The concluding chapter notes major and minor themes. The major themes are: academics, activities, curriculum, diversity, engagement, exposure to college, and faculty. The minor themes are: families, management, partner organizations, residential, scholarships, and STEM.

A case study methodology is the ideal approach to provide the level of depth and detail that practitioners will find helpful in learning about programs. The case study authors were asked to organize their cases in three sections: purpose, people, and pathways and then concluded with the connection to the 25 dimensions. The purpose sections ground the cases in why the programs exist and highlight that programs at different institutions and in different contexts have been created and developed for various reasons. There are programs filling gaps in local services, advancing university goals, and leveraging the unique assets and values of institutions for the broader public good and benefit of the institution. The key players identified in the people section of the cases include staff, students, faculty, among others who are teaching courses and supporting co-curricular experiences. The pathways section shows the range of experiences offered to participants in the variety of programs included in this volume.

As the editors note, “Although this book showcases nine programs, we do understand that there are hundreds more in higher education that are amazing in their own right” (p. 153). The editors also emphasize that the research on pre-college programs predominantly focuses on the federally-funded pre-college programs which are not included in this book. A nice addition to the book or a future volume might include the quantitative research findings from the federally-funded pre-college programs and a descriptive qualitative case or two that illustrates the key components of the program and additional details practitioners would find useful. A second category of programs that is worth capturing in these cases are pre-college programs like the University of Michigan’s Wolverine Pathways or Rutgers Future Scholars, which are intended to support students from specific geographic areas to prepare and succeed as college students at their respective institutions. Given the wide range of pre-college program types, there may be others categories too that are not represented in this book. Overall, this book provides the most complex and complete picture of the pre-college program landscape to date.

The cases provide important access and insight into the inner-workings of pre-college programs across the United States. An area that was under-examined in this volume are
the metrics for success and how each program is capturing and reporting on their impact. With a variety of purposes and program foci as highlighted in the purpose and pathways section, it would be helpful to practitioners to understand the range of ways programs identify success and if they are meeting their intended goals.

In the pre-college environment, practitioners and researchers are often not in dialogue. In the best case scenario, program designers and evaluators are familiar with the research and use it to inform the program design and evaluation. In this volume, only some of the case study authors cite scholars and theories that ground their program design and the program impact is not included. In a future volume, there is an opportunity to learn more about the theories that undergird the programs, the ways the program experiences and activities align with the theories, and how the impact is assessed.

Almost two decades ago, researchers noted the proliferation of college preparatory programs and the challenges in studying them that have persisted to today. However, researchers like William G. Tierney and Linda Serra Hagedorn provided a model for college preparation in their 2002 edited volume, *Increasing Access to College*. This book and future volumes would be strengthened by a brief literature review of the existing work which could be particularly useful and informative for practitioners who may or may not be familiar with what already exists in the field to build upon. Finally, offering a theoretical grounding could bring researchers and scholars into the pre-college program arena to wrestle with the complex ways needed to examine success individually and collectively and build a literature and evidence base that programs can rely on. There is always more work to be done, but this case study book is a significant step forward in increasing the understanding of pre-college programs today that provides new and experienced practitioners important insights directly from well-respected pre-college program directors across the United States and from a range of higher education institutions.

**REFERENCE**