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Making the Implicit Explicit: Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation

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Barbara E. Lovitts. *Making the Implicit Explicit: Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2007. 428 pp. Paper: \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-57922-181-2.

REVIEWED BY DEBRA S. GENTRY, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Making the Implicit Explicit: Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation offers a sound argument for helping doctoral students achieve high performance levels in the research and writing of their dissertation by providing clear and explicit performance expectations. Barbara Lovitts discusses the importance of explicit performance standards from a student advocacy standpoint, explaining the need to demystify the dissertation process and the need for reform in doctoral education. She makes a critical point in suggesting that the dissertation should be used as an outcome measure for assessing the strength of graduate programs.

The most important argument in this text suggests that the goal for making expectations explicit for producing quality dissertations is *not* to rate dissertations on a grading scale but to make performance standards clear to graduate students so that they (a) are not in the dark about what constitutes a sound, high-quality dissertation, (b) can learn to measure their own performance levels guided by rubrics, and (c) produce high-quality dissertations.

The author clearly states that providing doctoral students with explicit expectations should not replace the critical role of the advisor but should enhance the advising relationship between student and faculty member by providing a means for effective formative evaluation. This text is certainly one I wish I had had while writing my own dissertation. In addition to Lovitts's excellent rationales, she gives the reader detailed tables and rubrics that clearly outline the components and characteristics of different quality levels in dissertations.

This book is based on findings from Lovitts's 2003 study of nine doctoral-extensive research universities across 10 academic disciplines including the hard sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. In this study, 276 faculty representing 74 different departments participated in focus group interviews and answered questions about the characteristics and components of dissertations in their disciplines at differing levels of quality (outstanding, very good, acceptable, and unacceptable). Participating faculty were selected by high Ph.D. productivity; they had advised many doctoral students and served on many dissertation committees. The aggregate averages for focus group participants included 22 years as a professor,

chairing 13 dissertations, and membership on 36 dissertation committees. Focus groups were also conducted with graduate students to add their perspectives about dissertation expectations and to evaluate how their understandings differed from those of faculty.

Lovitts aggregated the focus group interviews by discipline and analyzed the findings using qualitative software. While disciplinary distinctions are obvious in the format of dissertations, faculty perspectives were very similar in identifying the characteristics of both very good and unacceptable dissertations. From the findings, Lovitts created rubrics and matrices that outline dissertation characteristics at different levels of quality overall and for her 10 disciplines: biology, physics, engineering, mathematics, economics, psychology, sociology, English, history, and philosophy. For each discipline, the tables summarize characteristics at four quality levels (outstanding, very good, acceptable, unacceptable) for each section of the dissertation (introduction, literature review, theory, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion).

This book is an excellent resource for graduate students beginning the dissertation phase, for faculty who serve on dissertation committees or as dissertation advisors, and for faculty who may teach dissertation process courses. This text is also a valuable resource for academic departments who may want or need to develop dissertation standards from the ground up or to revamp their existing standards and expectations. The strength of Lovitts's book lies in the practical usefulness of the text, in its provision of tables and matrices with clearly delineated characteristics of varying levels of dissertation quality, and in its functionality for the different academic disciplines.

Making the Implicit Explicit: Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation has one weakness and that is its lack of discussion and findings for the disciplines of education, business, and health care. Faculty members and students in these disciplines can benefit from this text but will have to extract information from it and translate it to their own disciplines. While it would be a massive undertaking to address all disciplines in this type of text, it seems that, because of their high numbers of Ph.D. recipients, some fields like education and business should be included.

Also to Lovitts's credit, this book makes an important argument for why academic departments need to make dissertation expectations explicit. Clear expectations can benefit program assessment and strengthen doctoral programs; can support doctoral students in writing quality dissertations and help reduce anxiety in the final phase of dissertation writing; and can support faculty members in the dissertation advising process. This text is clearly a contribution aimed

at improving the dissertation process and final product. Students and faculty alike will benefit from this practical and useful resource.

Marybeth Gasman. *Envisioning Black Colleges: A History of the United Negro College Fund.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. 288 pp. Cloth: \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-8018-8604-1.

REVIEWED BY PHILO A. HUTCHESON, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES DEPARTMENT, GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

One of the rapidly growing fields of historical research in higher education encompasses the experiences of African Americans, and Marybeth Gasman's new book on the United Negro College Fund is an invaluable contribution both to that field and to the general area of the history of higher education. She combines careful archival research, oral history interviews, and a clear interpretive framework in providing a readable and convincing work.

The United Negro College Fund began as the result of efforts by Frederick Douglass Patterson, then president of Tuskegee Institute, to overcome the multiple financial challenges faced by almost all of the private Black colleges in the 1940s. As Gasman points out, to some degree those institutions shared the financial straits of small colleges in general, but those conditions were sharply accentuated by racist assumptions about Negroes (a term both Gasman and I use to highlight the historical nature of agency of the time, when other terms, deeply insulting, were rampant).

And in a telling irony about race and education in the United States, she offers an extensive discussion of the curious ways in which John D. Rockefeller Jr., one of the most powerful captains of industry in the 1940s, supported the fund. He typically urged fellow capitalists to support the fund primarily on the basis of furthering social control; but as Gasman argues, the colleges and universities were able to use the ever-increasing monies from the fund to slowly and surely develop curricula as well as extracurricular activities that celebrated equality, the humanity of the oppressed Negro, and eventually, activism in the civil rights movement. Presidents at private Black colleges cooperated in ways that would be surprising for college presidents then and now, such as sharing donor lists, to ensure the survival of key institutions for higher education.

Gasman also provides readers with a curious aspect of the early years of the fund, the powerful efforts of wealthy White women in New York City. Led by Catherine Waddell, those women crossed racial boundaries by hosting integrated dinners

in their homes and pressured other women and men to contribute to the fund because they saw segregation as abhorrent. Fortunately, Gasman examines this part of the fund's history with acuity, noting not only the women's remarkable commitment but also their possible excitement about the exotic—crossing racial lines for reasons of equality and curiosity. In this latter sense, both White men and women too often expressed amazement at how intelligent the Negroes were, or even at the fact that they were well-educated. Furthermore, public (and some private) events were often carefully segregated, so that brushes with equality were only that—moments that did not extend to everyday life.

As the fund moved into its second decade of existence, the nation slowly experienced a revival of the integrationist movement of the 1940s, from which the fund both benefited and suffered. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision placed substantial pressure on Black colleges to justify their existence because of the legal assumption, too eagerly grasped by too many scholars and politicians, that not only was segregation a social evil but also that the separation of races necessarily entailed inferiority, a notion that saw an ugly highlight in the late 1960s with Christopher Jencks and David Riesman's declaration that by and large Black colleges were "academic disaster areas."

Gasman writes extensively about their work, critiquing their scholarship and their elite perspective and arguing that the visibility and scholarly responses eventually put Black colleges in a stronger position, although the notion of "second-best" continues today in some circles. Perhaps the most convincing part of her argument is that a nearly contemporary scholarly study of Negro colleges, conducted by Earl McGrath, received virtually no attention at the time and continues to be ignored by many scholars and policymakers.

Internally, the fund consistently moved from an almost entirely White staff to larger and larger proportions of Black staff members. Not surprisingly, given the small size of the staff, executive directors played a central role; and probably the most notable after the first, William Trent (who patiently but artfully dealt with the racists), is Vernon Jordan. Jordan came to the fund in 1970 and left after only two years to head the National Urban League because he could engage in programmatic work as well as fund-raising. When he came to the fund, it was operating at a loss, and major White donors were losing interest in supporting it. Jordan's fierce commitment to Black equality, framed in a personable and sociable approach, resulted in the still remarkable campaign, "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste." Developed by ad men and women at the powerful Young and Rubicam advertising agency and vetted by the fund staff, the campaign still endures today.