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Docking and Curtons' "Crisis in higher education: A plan to save small liberal arts colleges in America" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Docking, J. R., Curton, C. C. (2015). *Crisis in higher education: A plan to save small liberal arts colleges in America*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press. 141 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 9781611861549

Between 2005 and 2015 more than thirty small private colleges and universities closed their doors. With rising tuition costs, fewer students are choosing to attend private colleges, and more colleges will go out of business unless something is done to increase enrollment. Jeffrey Docking, the president of Adrian College in Michigan, faced just such a crisis but was able to turn the college around.

Docking says that many presidents of financially troubled colleges hope to save their institutions from collapse by belt-tightening or by unexpected donations from wealthy donors. This, Docking says, is just a pipe dream. Financial security comes only by increasing student enrollment, and to increase enrollment, Docking developed a plan that he calls “Admissions Growth,” a plan that saved Adrian College and that, the author insists, can save other small struggling institutions.

The ultimate goal of the Admissions Growth plan is to redirect new revenue to academic facilities and programs and to faculty development, but it cannot happen all at once. It must be done in stages. Dr. Docking’s Admissions Growth plan calls for a number of basic steps, beginning with setting admissions goals and then building and upgrading facilities even if it means borrowing money. The next step, says President Docking, is to fund extracurricular activities fully, including sports, that will attract students to campus, making coaches responsible for meeting recruitment goals. If recruiters and coaches fail to meet their new student quotas, they must be terminated. As enrollment increases, tuition dollars will flow in, and these should be used to build and upgrade facilities and to enable the college to fulfill its mission and to boost salaries to entice the best instructors to the campus. Finally, admissions growth will generate its own continuing momentum.

Docking mentions libraries in the context of enrollment strategies that do not work. He believes that it is futile to pour dollars into library holdings in the hope that a large library will tip the balance of a prospective student’s decision to enroll. He says that young people are just not that interested in libraries. If Docking’s plan can be faulted, it is in the area of student retention, and this is where libraries come in. The university library is one of the systems that supports learners. In this

connection, Haddow and Joseph (2010) explored the relationship between library use and the retention of new university students and found that library use by new university students was an important determining factor in their retention. Many a librarian has prevented a discouraged student from dropping out by providing help for assignments the student believed were impossible.

In conclusion, the strength of the Admissions Growth plan is that it has been successfully implemented at Adrian College and has turned that college around financially. From a Christian viewpoint, one of the troubling aspects of Admissions Growth is that it calls for ruthlessness. Heads of the various university programs are given admissions goals which, if not met, result in termination. Nevertheless, Docking provides a clear roadmap with bibliographic sources. He is right about enrollment being the key to a small college's survival. *Crisis in Higher Education* will be of vital interest to presidents, administrators, and employees of financially troubled institutions that are on the verge of collapse. The author emphasizes that the book is only an outline and that the specific details must be tweaked and worked out by bold, aggressive leaders.

Reviewer

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