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Reviewing *The Flourishing Student: A Practical Guide to Promote Mental Fitness, Well-being and Resilience in Higher Education*

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The Flourishing Student: A Practical Guide to Promote Mental Fitness, Well-being and Resilience in Higher Education (2nd ed.). By Fabienne Vailes. Eugene, OR: Practical Inspiration Publishing, 2022. 258 pp. ISBN 13: | 978-1-7886-0333-1 (PAPERBACK) \$28

In her book, author Fabienne Vailes voices an observation echoed throughout the halls of every university: students today are not the same as in previous years. Why? Vailes answers by offering a list of reasons why today's students differ from those a decade ago. After returning from a ten-year break from academia, Vailes noted a great difference in the stress and anxiety of students, as well as their difficulty in managing the same workload accomplished by students a decade previously. Vailes helps her readers understand the changing landscape of today's students and offers practical steps to walk students through their difficulties and to help them flourish in the higher education environment.

The book is divided into thirds. The first part describes the contributors to students' stress and inability to manage their studies. Vailes focuses on the idea of well-being and factors that prevent students from attaining mental well-being. The second portion focuses on the implications for higher educational institutions, what that entails for faculty and staff, and how to understand and support students—thereby enabling the students to flourish. The book's last portion is dedicated to implementation, a call to change the way higher education institutions view the system to best create a flourishing environment for all stakeholders.

In the first section of the book, Vailes points out COVID-19 and the social isolation of the lockdown, anxiety about the future, financial worries, parental expectations, fear of failure, transitioning to independent living, social media, overparenting, and poor health habits are all stressors in college and university students' lives. According to Vailes, students are overwhelmed and are afraid to get help for their anxiety due to the negative connotation associated with mental health issues. As students are overwhelmed with the changes and expectations

in their lives, they respond to the stress with “fight, flight, or freeze” (p. 42). The majority of students withdraw from attending class or do not turn in assignments because they feel overwhelmed. Vailes introduces the idea of challenging students to reframe stress by using stress as a good motivator. Though frequently given a bad connotation, stress can be viewed as a means to change students’ mindsets and work WITH the stress to achieve their goals. Neuroplasticity, the ability to reshape the mind, is a key element to changing the negative mindset and gaining a positive outlook in order to overcome the stress and anxiety students encounter.

The second portion of the book is dedicated to the idea that a new model—a whole-person model—is needed when addressing the students. The mind, body, and spiritual, emotional, and cognitive parts of a person need to be addressed as interactive components of a person, rather than compartmentalized areas. Vailes’ “Flourishing Student Model” gives the readers a visual image of flowers transplanted into a new soil or ecosystem—the higher education institution. The “soil” is the higher educational institution’s faculty and staff. Each faculty and staff member needs to be aware of student needs in order to provide enrichment, support for the students to thrive, and a physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe environment. However, Vailes does place responsibility upon the student to be aware of their needs and reach out to find elements needed for growth. Vailes continues her flower model to explain that the “roots” of the plant are the memories and past experiences of the students, which inform their reactions and choices in the new environment. The “stem” represents the student’s mindset with the growth mindset being key to the student’s ability to develop and learn. The “head of the flower” is composed of five health concepts—cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social—and five skills—flexibility, openness, curiosity, resilience, and language usage. Each plant is unique, as is each student, and each grows at different stages and has different requirements for growth.

The final third of the book is devoted to implementing the practices students need in order to flourish. The self-care of the faculty and staff is addressed first. If the faculty and staff are not healthy, they cannot care for the students without suffering themselves, and the author gives

insights on how to talk with and guide students in a positive manner. She then addresses how she would like higher educational institutions to adopt the Flourishing Student Model but do so by having each part of the institution adopt the practices and take ownership, rather than by a top-down model. Vailes encourages a growth mindset when adopting the model and keeps the idea of the school as an ecosystem. Creating a mechanized system is an easy solution, but the system approach—understanding that there is more than the surface issue—is the best way to serve the students. By looking at patterns and trends and identifying underlying assumptions and beliefs, faculty and staff can better understand their students and can best encourage them and communicate to them in a way that helps them grow and flourish.

The Flourishing Student is an excellent tool for those in higher education who seek to understand the students of today, learn how best to encourage them, and help them succeed in a university setting. Vailes mentions that the needs and characteristics of higher education students change every decade, and this book will help address the needs of the students today. If the growth mindset espoused in the book is embraced, the concepts models given in this book will enable the reader to adapt to the next decade of students as well. The book's final section does not give case studies of a higher education institution adopting the Flourishing Student Model, so without practical applications to view, it is rather difficult to envision this model being adopted by institutions. As it is, however, this model can help instructors and staff who desire to help and equip their students for a successful future.

REFERENCES

- Vailes, Fabienne. (2022). *The flourishing student: A practical guide to promote mental fitness, well-being and resilience in higher education* (2nd ed.) Practical Inspiration Publishing.

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