

The College Dropout Scandal by David Kirp. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019, 145pp. \$24.95, hardback.

Reviewed by Angeline Dean, *Rowan University*.

In *The College Dropout Scandal*, David Kirp, a New York Times contributor, a James D. Marver Professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy Berkeley, CA, and a member of Obama's transition team, countlessly enunciated and illustrated that there are some simple ways to begin to raise graduation rates. He provides blueprints to close the opportunity gaps, gave attention to the education debt owed to millions of students, and reinforced the use of data analytics (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012). This scandal, spoken of by Kirp, is perpetuated via the lack of leadership by college presidents, staff, bureaucracy, capitalism, and the desire to receive college rank recognition. Kirp called out not only the structures, but also ideologies and many other institutional barriers that sustain commodification at these colleges, especially for Black and Brown students. Kirp advocates that students are more than import/export dollars who lacked assistance; they are human beings who deserved more than what they received.

The book consists of an introduction and eight chapters. David Kirp wastes no time delving into what is the crux of the book. He headlines the first two pages of the introduction with David Laude, of the University of Texas, taking full responsibility of a missed opportunity to retain an African American male student. In the teams angst to accept and provide an opportunity for the student, they neglect to provide a sense of relationship and belonging first. Kirp then freely begins to call out the fact that no one is held responsible for the monotonous state of affairs that lead to the dropout scandal. As he addresses this overall issue, he provides bite-size examples of what equity disparities in education look like and further analyzes how health inequities effect education as well. He then segues into chapter one and sets the stage by elaborating on the critical need for fostering a sense of belonging. Kirk provides many tested, relevant, cost-effective, and working examples that exemplify a sense of belonging to undergraduate and first-generation students. He continues by addressing curriculum change, positive strategies that cost little to nothing per student, and resilience-building along with maintenance methods in order to propel a "growth mindset" (p. 22). The theme of chapter 2 is "...demographics are not destiny" (p. 32). Kirp spends time elaborating on how Georgia State University (GSU) took time self-reflecting versus blaming students for any challenges. For example, GSU created a one-stop-shop within their admissions department in order to foster a sleeker, smoother, transition process for undergrads, instead of sectioning out the many departments that a student has to travel to across campus. In fact, GSU laid off top administration in order to hire more advisors and creates mini grants as a means of retention for students in their hard times. Chapter 3 spotlights programs from the City University of New York and Rutgers Newark where social justice and equity do not appear as just mere buzzwords. Kirp highlights responsibilities and programs that both the institution and the teachers initiate in order to build and reinforce self-efficacy for their students while dealing with systemic issues. In chapter 4, we learn of a young man by the name of Angel Sanchez. Angel received a post-it note that stated, "Come see us when you get out" while serving a 30-yr. prison term for attempted murder at age 16 (p. 65). Angel's term was cut in half through his own self-advocacy, and he is a story of redemption for the University of Central Florida and Valencia College. Stories of resilience are throughout chapter 4, as these two colleges also join forces in order to "plug the leaky pipeline" between degree programs, interconnect with the community, and denote an understanding of

belonging both through brick and mortar and online (p. 79). “Every student can get an A,” was one of the headlines that caught my eye in chapter 5 (p. 88). Although Kirp touts changes to curriculum and the structure of instruction as the answer, I view what occurs as interest convergence. Initially, professors ridded themselves of students who did not catch on to the assignments fast, and their attitudes towards students needed much improvement. Yet, upon receiving a healthy financial incentive, these same professors’ attitudes changed, failure rates declined, and “A” students of color were now *produced* (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Chapter 6 expanded on the reach of partnerships with this time focusing on a college working with teachers and building Pre-K-college curriculum. This chapter was the first to identify a mayor as a political figure working for change along with the California State Regent’s governing board. Finally, chapter 7 emerges into the territory of racism, classism, gender, and the power of protest and student voice. Kirp illustrates how those of “radically different life histories” belong and can be woven into the many different spaces on a campus (p. 132). Chapter 8 closed with a brief overview, reports from Aspen Institute and the Education Trust, and high-quality questions positioned for administration to reflect and answer such as, what strategies are necessary for student-oriented success? How do students define success?

In summary, Kirp does a great job providing evidence to back his claim of a scandal and showcase what works in colleges to support students and foster a “growth mindset” as well as build bridges of belonging (p. 22). However, a few things greatly disturbed me about the book. First, Kirp spoke of systemic structures and policies in place that cripple those of color, yet consistently referred to Black and Brown bodies as poor students and minorities versus minoritized bodies who are rich in spirit despite what has happened to them and their communities. Second, there were times when statements painted Black and Brown people as monolithic, and last, I only read of one person paying homage and learning from the work of HBCU’s in addition to one portion of a chapter giving voice to racism on campuses.

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