

# Introduction to *Best Practices*

## Summer 2005

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In 1996 Bill Cosby gave the commencement speech at Boston College. His words are illustrative of one aspect of the theme “Student Preparedness for Life After College” for this issue of *Best Practices*. Speaking to the graduates, he said:

I think everyone says the same thing over and over at graduations. One of the things you hear is “You are going forth to make a change.” That’s news to these people [the parents and family members] around you. As far as they know, you’re coming back home. . . . You are going to leave this football field, and a lot of you don’t know what you’re going to do even though you’ve had [at least] four years to figure this out (*Boston College Magazine*, Summer 1996).

The validity of Cosby’s statement can be supported by the many questions students have when they graduate from college—questions that focus on careers and how to attain a pretty good standard of living. But there is another way to think about “student preparedness for life after college” that is not primarily focused on establishing a career and making a living. This other way draws attention to a hope of what students will become as a result of their college commitment. The articles in this issue of *Best Practices* articulate this hope.

Stephen Olbrys, in his article “The Ivory Tower, Apathy, and the Art of Citizenship,” wants students to leave college with a commitment to citizenship that engages them as responsible citizens active in the dynamics of civic responsibility. He writes that this commitment begins in the college classroom where students assume an apprentice type role and the teacher brings to the classroom all sorts of learning that shapes the horizons of engaged citizenship. What does college prepare students for after graduation? It prepares them for civic engagement not civic apathy.

Noam Shpancer, in his article “College: What’s in it for Students?,” feels that students leave college with an understanding that graduation is more than their GPA. It is an *experience* that shapes not only career aspirations, but also life’s goals. The college experience is an internalization of a time in life that is used as a reference point for the rest of life. What does college prepare students for after graduation? It is a forming experience in which students see themselves and the world in a new light.

Kathy Kennedy, in her article “Integrating Technical Skills and Soft Skills to Ensure Student Success,” hopes that students will have a greater capacity to join their technical abilities with knowledge in human relations. The “Complete Technician” is one who knows how to do a job as well as to relate effectively with others. What does college prepare students for after graduation? It prepares them to enter both careers and relationships with a technical skill and sensitivity for perceiving both the explicit and implicit human dynamics of the working environment.

Robert Case, in his article “First-Generation College Students: Fostering Success in College and after College,” states that first-generation students should

leave college enamored with a strong sense of purpose to become socially responsible and linked with communities as advocates for choosing a college education. He strongly recommends that colleges must change to embrace a more dialogical method for instilling in students a desire to seek leadership roles in the community. What does college prepare students for after graduation? It prepares them to transform communities.

Ed Hara, in his article “Teacher, Interrupted: Life Lessons and Life Skills,” shows that students will be engaged in critical moments of learning that are not necessarily etched in the course syllabus. He argues that this critical appreciation for learning emerges from an in-depth dialogue between reading and the circumstances that make up “the minefield of contemporary life.” What does college prepare students for after graduation? It prepares them to be critical consumers of life.

Then, in two related essays by English teachers—Evelyn Beck’s “Prepared to Graduate” and Diane Henningfeld’s “Teaching the Journey: English 101 as a Site for Making Meaning”—we see classes as a way of having students construct their own “selves” by way of creating a collaborative community.

There is a common thread that sews these articles together. They present a challenge to both the college institution and to the college instructor to find ways that engage students in life, instead of only preparing them for a career. Each article includes ideas and examples on how the college classroom and the college institution can integrate meaningful experiences that prepare students for life after college.

And, of course, *Best Practices* would not be complete without including a book review and interview.

Melody Flowers reviews *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* by David Kirp. She neatly summarizes Kirp’s more positive appraisal of colleges and universities that have ventured into the risky waters of supporting student learning that may not be exclusively driven by profit interests. Instead, the marketplace is asking education to consider an investment in human capital as well.

Finally, in an interview with Wayne Blinka, Cluster Director for Engineering Technologies at TSTC Waco, he talks about his move from industry to teaching and the influence he has had on guiding his cluster to respond to the TSTC mission of “of making *good* technicians fast.”

In 1996, Cosby may have left those graduates laughing, but I hope with a purpose.

Happy reading!

*Rich Kirk*  
*Director, Student Success*  
*Texas State Technical College Harlingen*