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*The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students
About Vocation* by Tim Clydesdale (review)

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Tim Clydesdale. *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students About Vocation.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. 334 pp. Hardcover: \$27.50. ISBN: 0-226-23634-X

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Accountability is not new to higher education, but with rising college costs and budget cuts, coupled with high unemployment rates, higher education is under increased pressure to do more with less. In addition, everyone, from parents to policymakers, seems to place the blame on colleges and universities for not better preparing college graduates for the workforce. In his book, *The Purposeful Graduate*, Dr. Tim Clydesdale, professor of sociology at the College of New Jersey, defends higher education, arguing that “macroinstitutional pressures... have kept graduate median incomes flat” and “macrocultural changes...have extended paths to adulthood” (p. xvi). However, based on Clydesdale’s empirical study on the Lilly Endowment’s Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV) Initiative, *The Purposeful Graduate* provides a compelling argument for colleges and universities to engage undergraduate students in meaningful discourse “exploring purpose and vocation creatively and intentionally” (p. 41).

Comprised of a preface, seven chapters, and several appendices, at first glance, *The Purposeful Graduate* appears to be a 334-page-long program evaluation report. However, it is more than just a report; in fact, prefaced in the context of Deblanco’s (2012) *College: What it Was and How it Should Be*; Arum and Roksa’s (2010) *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*; Keeling and Hersh’s (2011) *We’re Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education*; and Astin, Astin, and Lindholm’s (2010) *Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students’ Inner Lives*, Clydesdale centers his book as part of a larger conversation about college students’ purpose and holistic development.

The major impetus of this book focuses on purpose exploration programs, defined as “programming that would foster campus conversations about questions of meaning and purpose” (p. 3). Clydesdale begins each chapter with a metaphor or real-life example from his study. In the preface, Clydesdale compares purpose exploration programs to gardens, suggesting that with care from knowledgeable professionals, both have the potential to cultivate growth and produce incredible

results. Moreover, Clydesdale argues that purpose exploration programs increase student engagement, help students prepare for their future, and encourage students to succeed in and after college.

In Chapter 1, Clydesdale provides an overview of his empirical study of 88 religiously-affiliated colleges and universities funded by the Lilly Endowment, which granted upwards of \$225 million dollars to design and implement purpose exploration programs that would “foster campus conversations about meaning and purpose, and in particular their religious underpinnings” (p. 3). Through the use of multiple data sources, including surveys and interviews with students, faculty, and staff, Clydesdale sought to understand what set successful programs of purpose exploration apart from unsuccessful ones and how purpose exploration programs affected college students. Although the degree of religious affiliation of each college and university varied, each institution shared a commitment to having thoughtful engagement of vocational calling through numerous programmatic initiatives.

Conducting panel interviews with 125 college graduates—60 of whom had participated in exploration programs and 65 of whom had not—Clydesdale found that the students who participated in exploration programs gained a sense of “grounded idealism” and “resilience and persistence” that would ultimately carry over beyond graduation (p. 18). A key strength of this chapter was the manner in which Clydesdale presented student profiles. By examining and contrasting the college experiences and career trajectories of three students (using pseudonyms) who participated in exploration programs with three students who did not, Clydesdale “[demonstrates] the efficacy of campus-based exploration programs” (p. 20). Clydesdale concludes Chapter 1 with an overview of the book’s aims while imagining the possibilities about what higher education institutions look like when “genuine learning and passionate purposes unite” (p. 26).

Clydesdale begins Chapter 2 by highlighting a Jesuit institution’s programming initiatives that consisted of internships, service trips, courses and seminars; campus-wide lecture series and concerts; and a weekend retreat for upperclass students to discuss purpose. While acknowledging the achievements and missteps of each individual event, Clydesdale praised their programmatic efforts and commitment to evaluating and improving these programs. The remainder of this chapter introduces the reader to the Lilly Endowment and provides more details about the national initiative and Clydesdale’s study. Hired as this initiative’s national external evaluator, Clydesdale utilizes “standard, social scientific methods of data collection and analysis,” and his analysis is thorough, reporting

both the faults and successes of programs (p. 47). Similar to his approach in each of the chapters, Clydesdale thoughtfully transitions to subsequent chapters, acknowledging that the primary focus of this text lies in Chapters 3 through 5, in which Clydesdale delves into program designs and the effects of exploration programs on students, faculty, and staff.

Continuing the garden analogy introduced in the preface, Clydesdale writes about program designs in Chapter 3, giving overviews of four successful programs before expanding the facets of program design to a more general application. In terms of design, organizational location, collaboration with other departments, and support from senior-level administrators mattered; the programs housed in and implemented by one division or department tended to have a limited impact. Clydesdale also described other pertinent program components, such as for whom the program was designed (students or faculty and staff), public relations about the program, the emotional intelligence of program coordinators, and how closely the program fit within the institutional mission and culture. Clydesdale urges readers to use this chapter as a guide when designing their own programs of purpose exploration.

Chapter 4, 85 pages into the book, is where Clydesdale really delves into the implications of the initiative. After offering examples of the self-defining six types of students on college campuses and the types of students most likely to participate in purpose exploration programs from his interviews and focus groups, Clydesdale describes the effects of purpose exploration programs on students: retention, career trajectory calibration, social norm formation, and maturation. According to Clydesdale, of these four effects, retention was the most surprising: "That exploration programs possessed notable retention effects is remarkable, since this initiative was not launched to improve retention" (p. 97). In terms of both maturity and career trajectory, Clydesdale, through interviews with alumni, found that the effects of purpose exploration programs lasted beyond college: "Recent graduates who participated in purpose exploration programs as students voiced longer-term perspectives and demonstrated persistence in spite of setbacks" (p. 117).

A noteworthy aspect of Chapter 5 is Clydesdale's awareness and explanation of these programs' impacts on faculty and staff. Based on survey data, Clydesdale describes how purpose exploration programs, despite their focus on students, positively affected faculty and staff. One professor, in a survey, wrote, "Exploration programs enabled me to advise students in a far more meaningful way than I had prior to participating" (p. 134). Clydesdale's knowledge of the higher education

climate is illustrated through reflections on silos, job responsibilities (generalists vs. specialists), and other aspects of campus culture. Clydesdale argues that exploration programs helped bring faculty and staff together and centralize their roles within the campus. This was not without challenges, though.

Introducing purpose exploration programs to more secular campuses led to reactions from faculty and staff that were less than accepting; yet once faculty and staff saw how these programs could holistically develop students, and once they learned of faculty and staff incentives (i.e., participating in or leading purpose exploration programs aided many faculty in or accelerated the tenure process), they warmed up to, and in many cases even embraced, the idea. Furthermore, gaining support from faculty and staff—from new employees to senior administrators—was vital for the success of exploration programs.

In one of the most important chapters in this text, Chapter 6, Clydesdale shares a strategic ecology to help readers design and implement effective purpose exploration programs on their own campuses. As Clydesdale puts it, "This is one section that practically minded readers ought not skip" (p. 188). Tables 6.1 and 6.2 on pages 179 and 189, respectively, provide overviews of common mistakes and successful strategies program designers can learn from and use. Generally speaking, Clydesdale posits that implementation mistakes only weakened programs and lessened their impact; on the other hand, many successful programs outlasted their grants, for several of the reasons presented in this chapter. Clydesdale concludes Chapter 6 by inviting all campuses to "engage students in conversations about purpose and calling" (p. 198).

Using the metaphor of a lever, Clydesdale recaps the six previous chapters and provides larger lessons on exploration programs in Chapter 7. Summarizing differences between programs, Clydesdale reviews the positive effects of and defends purpose exploration programs:

[A program of purpose exploration] is a demonstrably effective way to increase campus engagement and satisfaction, to focus attention beyond campus bubbles, and to supply a language, conversation partners, and generative resources that improve successful navigation of our highly competitive and complex world. (p. 204)

It is in Chapter 7 that Clydesdale encourages institutions to incorporate a theological framework into exploration programs and conversations. Emphasizing the need to personalize a purpose exploration program to fit its campus, Clydesdale writes, "the significance of contextually appropri-

ate terminology cannot be underestimated.” more secular institutions might introduce theology in a historical context and avoid strong religious language (i.e., emphasizing purpose over vocation), whereas institutions with stronger religious affiliations may find clerical language more appropriate (p. 218). This is not to say that secular institutions cannot implement purpose exploration programs; rather, Clydesdale acknowledges that purpose exploration programs should fit the existing institutional culture.

Clydesdale concludes Chapter 7 outlining how readers can implement exploration programs—or even smaller components of exploration programs—on their own campuses. Specific recommendations include designing programs to fit within the current institutional context and regularly evaluating and improving programs to meet students’ needs. Clydesdale also suggests targeting students who are most likely to participate and benefit from exploration programs: sophomores and juniors—“programs that targeted undergraduates during their sophomore and junior years, when they were less distracted by entering and exiting processes, accomplished disproportionately more of their goals” (p. 82). The remaining 100 pages include appendixes that lists the colleges and universities that participated in the national initiative; Clydesdale’s evaluation methodology, including interview and survey questions; and programming resources for purpose exploration program directors.

Being accused of failing to prepare students for the workforce at inaccessible costs, higher education faces much scrutiny. To help combat this phenomenon, Clydesdale urges higher education professionals to have conversations and facilitate programs about purpose exploration. Adding to existing literature on purpose exploration programs, *The Purposeful Graduate* is a compelling argument for these types of programs: “My contribution is that [purposeful education] works, that it inspires students and educators deeply and equally, and that it is effective on a wide variety of campuses” (p. 230).

One critique of Clydesdale’s work is the overall balance of the text. Although it is necessary for Clydesdale to explain the PTEV initiative and study, it does take a few chapters for Clydesdale to really get to the heart of his testimony. On the other hand, a key strength of this text is Clydesdale’s intentional organization of each chapter by beginning with anecdotal evidence to contextualize the chapter topic before jumping into a more in-depth analysis. As a result, Clydesdale seamlessly blends analogies and narrative with quantitative data to help establish his credibility as both an author and an evaluator and to reach a broader audience.

The Purposeful Graduate is not merely a report on Clydesdale’s study for the Lilly Endowment—although the Lilly Endowment could certainly conclude that the initiative was money well spent. It is also an in-depth, practical guide for colleges and universities on how to design and implement successful purpose exploration programs. Clydesdale’s book is a fundamental addition for higher education professionals hoping to address institutional challenges, holistically educate students, and reinvigorate their campuses. By helping students nurture their sense of purpose, higher education professionals can help students survive the changing workforce, while also leading lives that matter.

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The story is now all too familiar. A well-meaning student goes to college, joins a social fraternity or sorority, selects a major based upon his or her perception of the significance of its immediate economic return, tolerates a relatively fragmented array of general education classes, gets a job within six months of graduation, and settles into a life that progresses with little to no greater purpose than participation in an ongoing cycle of production and consumption.

Such young people are male and female, from backgrounds dotting the economic spectrum, and represent every ethnicity. All said, they had the experience of attending college, but in both the short and long-runs, they missed out on the meaning such an experience was originally designed to offer.

Too often, students are blamed as they are viewed as being immature and thus unable to