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The 160-Character Solution: How Text Messaging and Other Behavioral Strategies Can Improve Education, by Benjamin Castleman

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Castleman, Benjamin J. *The 160-Character Solution: How Text Messaging and Other Behavioral Strategies Can Improve Education.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. 152 p. ISBN 9781421418742. \$22.95.

In *The 160-Character Solution: How Text Messaging and Other Behavioral Strategies Can Improve Education*, Benjamin J. Castleman offers specific approaches for recruiting and retaining college students, especially those students whose socioeconomic conditions may deter them from making informed choices about their education. Castleman asks university stakeholders to be cognizant of the overabundance of information students and their families must wade through when seeking out a university. He suggests the need for more effective communication across relevant mediums, such as text messaging, and he cites case studies where the use of these mediums has increased applications and enrollment. The book is useful for inspiring active, pragmatic approaches to retention and recruitment at any college or university. Further, it seems especially appropriate for the efforts of state comprehensive universities that often recruit students who have less familiarity with the details involved in navigating a university education.

Castleman's argument is effective in urging universities to rethink the ways they inform and offer resources to students and their families. He suggests that most universities could simplify the information they offer to potential students as well as make more creative use of everyday modes of communication. Castleman describes several factors that influence students' and families' perceptions about such matters as the types of schools they could apply to as well as the availability of financial aid. Many students, especially those from underserved populations, overestimate the costs of postsecondary education as well as their own potential to be admitted to a quality university. As a result, far fewer qualified students from low-income families are likely to apply to universities than more privileged students whose families often have more familiarity with the process as well as access to helpful resources. Castleman's delineation of the issues involved in recruiting underprivileged students will be useful for readers who are concerned with social equity and opportunity. These readers might also consider how and when questions of retention and engagement arise for university stakeholders as well as how these questions are articulated as good for the health of the university versus (or complementary to) the good of students.

While Castleman covers a range of factors that affect students' decisions about attending college, and he frames his suggestions as a series of behavioral interventions on communicative and social levels,

the book is too brief to explore the complexities of these factors. For instance, early in the book, Castleman suggests that students who are economically and otherwise disadvantaged often need only the right information to apply to exclusive universities – that what is holding them back is mainly a matter of the right medium and pacing for information about such matters as financial support. Elsewhere, Castleman indicates that social and cultural factors will influence these decisions, but the complexities of these factors could have been explored more deeply and perhaps have yielded more suggestions about effective communication and encouragement for these students.

Overall, this is a timely book, as concerns about enrollment and retention are on the rise at many universities. Universities cannot discuss strategies for retention, recruitment, and matriculation without more education for faculty and staff about the complex and diverse nature of potential and current students. This is an ongoing process, one that is especially important for state comprehensive universities. Such universities have a unique opportunity to transform students' experiences of education and schooling, aid them in completing a college degree, and, in many cases, facilitate change in the trajectory of their life and career paths. Castleman's ideas are a sufficient, helpful nudge for those of us invested in not only upholding a university mission but also acknowledging and working with the diverse backgrounds and attitudes that students bring to their education.

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