

In Memoriam: Arthur Wright Chickering

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We lost a prolific scholar, influential thought leader and innovator on August 15, 2020 with the passing of Arthur Wright Chickering. His distinguished career spanned more than six decades and is marked by a long-standing, unquenchable desire to improve learning, teaching, and the quality of the undergraduate student experience. His prose was crisp and lucid, a byproduct of his deep, abiding interest in and affection for a variety of literary genres, which compelled him to seriously consider advanced graduate study in the humanities. Instead, circumstances led him to a school psychology doctoral program at Columbia University.

Chick's seminal contributions to the higher education literature addressed many of the more pressing issues facing colleges and universities beginning in the 1960s through the early years of the 21st Century. Here is a sampling.

His 1969 book, *Education and Identity*, is a classic, receiving the American Council of Education's "Book of the Year Award." It provided the field with an empirically grounded conceptual framework for understanding the importance of the college years in advancing holistic student development. The volume featured seven psycho-social vectors of development that informed the way generations of graduate students, student affairs professionals, and faculty members approached their work. Always sensitive to the challenges and opportunities of the times, in *Commuters vs Resident Students* (1974) he illuminated the differences in college impact for these two large groups of undergraduates including recommendations for enhancing the richness of the experience for each. In *The Modern American College* (1981), distinguished contributors joined Chick in examining the changing role of the higher education in American life, the increasing diversity of students pursuing postsecondary education including adult learners, and the implications of these trends for policy and practice. Through his involvement with the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), he was a tireless advocate for finding ways to help older learners succeed in higher education and to create alternative forms of assessment of experiential learning. A more recent major book (coauthored) was *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education* (2007), continuing his longstanding interest in holistic human development.

With long-time colleague and collaborator, Zelda Gamson, Chick co-authored *Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (1987) which may be the most widely disseminated publication focused on higher education in the U.S. The product of a multi-day meeting of knowledgeable professionals at the Wingspread Retreat Center in Wisconsin, these principles became a foundation for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE); Chick was a member of NSSE's Design Team led by Peter Ewell.

Assessment professionals are indebted to Chick for his pioneering work illustrating how and why data about the student experience can be used in institutional decision making. Indeed, today's emphasis on obtaining evidence

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of student accomplishment through systematic assessment of learning outcomes is a logical extension of Chick's work. In his book, *Cool Passion: Challenging Higher Education* (2015), Chick's retrospective description of the Goddard College longitudinal research that resulted in *Education and Identity* seems unusually ambitious. The book is a product of a mixed-method design employing multiple instruments, uncommon for the times. Imagine recruiting substantial proportions of first-year students and having each of them complete 16 hours of inventories and tests, all the while motivating them to do their best work. Assuming all this can be handled logistically, imagine further how to entice the same students to participate multiple times thereafter during their college experience to complete similar batteries of tools and participate in interviews to boot. Then there was the non-trivial matter of involving Goddard College's faculty in using the data.

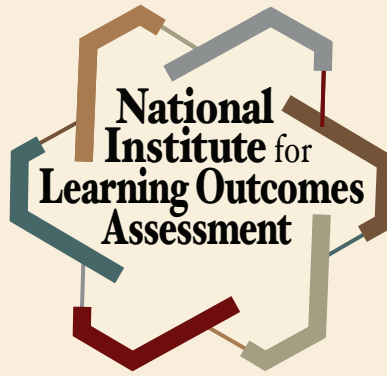
Then as today, *data use* is challenging. While there are plenty such efforts under way, the fruits of these labors have not brought about the transformation of teaching and learning to foster the holistic student development Chick championed. During the Goddard project, Chick convened weekly Friday afternoon faculty meetings. Chick reflected, "These conversations led to continuous fine tuning of existing programs and to further initiatives, some of which became grant funded." Even so, it was not long before he realized that while at points he seemed to catch "lightning in a bottle," he later reluctantly admitted that subsequent workshops and reports sadly revealed "no real changes occurred that were stimulated by our findings."

In addition to the steady stream of publications, Chick put research-informed findings into practice while serving in faculty and administrative positions at Monmouth College (NJ), Empire State College, Memphis State University, George Mason University, Norwich University and Goddard College, along with a host of project and visiting appointments in the U.S. and abroad. As expected of a consummate professional, Chick served on numerous association advisory and editorial boards. An avid outdoorsman and proud member of the Professional Ski Instructors of America, he was known to arrive for a project team meeting after skiing somewhere for a week, with all of his "meeting" clothes and materials stuffed in his ski bag.

Chick's obituary from the *Barre-Montpelier Times Argus* Vermont newspaper features a loving farewell from his life partner of 69 years, Jo: https://www.timesargus.com/obituaries/arthur-wright-chickering/article_eed82d6d-b375-5f78-9cbc-8988cf26fae2.html. Characteristically modest in terms of his professional accomplishments, this short piece captures the essence of the man: compassionate, caring, committed, unconventional, engaged, authentic—a role model for us all.

Rest in peace, good friend.

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