

BOOK REVIEW

Academic Coaching: Coaching College Students for Success

Reviewed by Bridgett Lowery

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND BOOK

Bridgett Lowery is the academic success coordinator at Bellin College. She holds a degree in Education from Michigan State University and a Master of Arts in History from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She oversees the student success space and peer academic coaches while coaching students on academic and executive function skills and creating programming for the college. Lowery teaches history and diversity classes in the general education department and teaches the student success class for both the first-year experience and the Bellin College Health Care Academy. Recently, Lowery was elected as an executive officer for the Wisconsin College Learning Center Association. She is a certified meditation instructor and brings a holistic view to student success.

Book Information

Howlett, M. & Rademacher, K. (2023). *Academic coaching: coaching college students for success*. Routledge.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

In *Academic Coaching: Coaching College Students for Success*, Marc A. Howlett and Kristen Rademacher explain the history of academic coaching and outline a comprehensive guide to the components of effective academic coaching and their applications. The book is divided into four parts, with each containing chapters that can be revisited independently for the reader's reference. Each part is rife with examples of conversations with fictitious students, and each chapter ends with various references. As such, this book can serve as a constant touchpoint for student-facing professionals. Howlett and Rademacher achieve their goal of providing "a resource to other higher education professionals who want to expand or incorporate academic coaching into their work" (2023, p. 3).

The origin of campus resources is rarely considered, but Howlett and Rademacher take time to draw connections and distinctions between academic coaching and life and sports coaching. They explain how academic coaching transformed from support for first-generation students and students with ADHD to a service focused on retention and graduation initiatives (Howlett & Rademacher, 2023). As professional academic coaches at the University of North Carolina, the authors conclude Part I by sharing how they shape their professional practices. They pull in various higher education philosophies, such as self-determination and growth mindset, and explain the relevance of each to a student-focused experience. But Howlett and Rademacher do not stop at explanations. They acknowledge that professionals "may want to take a student-centered approach. Yet they may not know how to translate that wish to a method of working with students on a day-to-day basis" (p. 21). That admission leads the reader into the book's most dynamic and valuable part.

Part II, "Academic Coaching Model", begins with the shift when Howlett and Rademacher implemented coaching practices into their student appointments. They explain, "we wanted to facilitate students' long-term growth and development of skills through collaborative, action-orientated conversations" (2023, p. 31). This part of the book builds, piece by piece, the components of effective coaching that keep the student at the center while developing them not only as a student working on a particular subject or habit but as an individual who will continue to grow. This foundation is essential for both novice and experienced professionals. Academic coaches new to the field will benefit greatly from the robust definition of academic coaching and how Howlett and Rademacher dissect each component. The most tenured academic coaches will be well-served to examine their current practices and reflect on how they execute the definition during each student interaction. As Part II continues, a clear picture of what makes effective academic coaching emerges. In a particularly memorable way, the authors assert that students do not "need to be fixed" (Howlett & Rademacher, 2023, p. 43), and viewing them as though they do leads to a relationship with the student like a car and a mechanic. "We kick the tires, run some tests, make repairs, and then send the student car back out on the road. We do the diagnostic work rather than help the student learn how to independently analyze and improve their own situation" (p. 43). The latter part of that analogy is the crux of their argument. It is teased out in the remaining chapters of Part II, which

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spell out how to conduct a coaching session, including questions, self-management, and how to allot time. Part II concludes with a vivid and helpful dialogue between an academic coach and a fictitious student, in which the authors include commentary to provide a framework for a session.

The next part of the book extends the circle of academic coaching. Howlett and Rademacher take coaching out of the learning center and devote two chapters to how faculty and staff can implement Part II's philosophies and best practices in their work with students (2023). Student success professionals know their work cannot be completed in a vacuum. However, articulating why it is essential to collaborate with others and how to go about it is a refreshing and much-needed voice in the academic success conversation. Staying true to a student-centered approach, Chapter 12, "The Great Diversity of College Students," considers the needs of the variety of students on a college campus, including, but not limited to, first-gen students, international students, and transfer students. All the while, Howlett and Rademacher are clear that "overgeneralizing about college students can be counterproductive" (Howlett & Rademacher, 2023, p. 131), and they are steadfast in their argument that the individual student, who is the expert in their lives, remains the focus of each coaching session (2023).

Academic coaching is work that demands a tremendous amount of emotional labor. Howlett and

Rademacher could have ended the book after Part III, but they chose to include a final part, "Next Steps," that begins with professional development. As we embrace the journey of students' development, the authors encourage us, as professionals, to remember that "there's always the ability to learn, grow, and improve" (Howlett & Rademacher, 2023, p. 161). The encouragement to take time to reflect on our development is much needed. Introspection was a beneficial way to begin the concluding part. Moreover, since most of the intended audience of this book is learning center professionals, the book wraps up with ideas on building and augmenting academic success programs and training staff.

While much has been written about student success, a resource to guide professionals in executing the work was largely missing. Howlett and Rademacher fill that gap with their rich expertise and highlight the voices of others in the field. Academic coaches, learning center staff of all levels, and professionals in adjacent fields will benefit from reading and revisiting this book.

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