



Habits of Mind: Fostering Access and Excellence in Higher Education

Carol M. Allen, William B. Allen

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Habits of Mind maintains that the fact that almost everyone now goes to college need not be seen as an obstacle to excellence in education. Some critics have insisted that college is not for everyone, but William B. Allen and Carol Allen assert that the college diploma has rightly become as much the norm in this century as the high school diploma was during the twentieth century. Accordingly, it is essential that higher education remains true to its deepest purpose: the cultivation of proficient humanity. The authors see the key to this goal as the development of judgment, or "habits of mind." Habits of mind are far and away the most influential determinants of human conduct, and nowhere are they more profoundly shaped than in institutions of higher education. Furthermore, liberal education has proven most effective in this undertaking.

The authors elaborate on the purpose of higher education and identify the chief obstacles to achieving its aim. They demonstrate the critical role of academic leaders in achieving the aim of higher education and posit that excellence in judgment is the primary characteristic of the academic leaders who fulfill this role. They examine three aspects of access to higher education: academic readiness, the cost and funding of higher education, and the capacity of the physical plant. Finally, they use policies developed in Virginia to demonstrate realistic approaches to achieving the aims of access and quality discussed throughout the book.

The authors draw on their years of experience as practitioners in both private and public institutions, liberal arts colleges, and research universities to develop their material. This volume will be of interest to faculty and students in higher education programs, nation and state public policymakers, legislative and academic leaders, and a general public concerned about the cost and value of a college education.

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