A Framework for Organizing the Scholarship of Campus Ecology

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Campus Ecology is the conceptual framework focused on the dynamic relationship between students and the campus environment. This article brings together the scholarship related to the campus ecology movement and places it into a conceptual framework. This framework divides this scholarship into seven distinct categories with the intention of creating a user-friendly resource for the further study and application of campus ecology in higher education.

Campus ecology is a conceptual framework focused on the dynamic relationship between students and the campus environment. It is a framework that allows the student affairs profession not only to think about its work as encompassing students and their development, but also to develop and change campus environments to foster student learning and development. The "campus ecology" movement began in the early 1970s and significant scholarship associated with campus ecology has been published during the past thirty years. The resources representing this scholarship have been scattered across several fields (student personnel, counseling psychology, and ecological/environmental psychology) and have never been brought together into one location.

The purpose of this article is two-fold: (1) to bring together the body of work related to the development and application of the campus ecology movement in college and university student affairs work, and (2) to present this literature within a conceptual framework. Through the search for campus ecology related material, approximately one hundred articles, monographs, and books were located. Chronologically, the literature begins with Lewin's (1936) book, Principles of Topological Psychology, and

The conceptual framework is built around the following structure: (a) foundation scholarship associated with the *ecological/environmental perspective*, (b) foundation scholarship associated with the *college environment* literature.

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(c) works focusing on the conceptual framework of campus ecology, (d) works with a focus on campus assessment and design from the campus ecology perspective, (e) scholarship relating to student development theory/practice and campus ecology, (f) resources focusing on campus programs (i.e. administration, admissions, college unions, counseling programs, housing, ombudsman programs, and outdoor programs), and (g) resources which focus on campus issues from the campus ecology perspective (i.e. academic integrity, student activism, diversity, first year students, student involvement, and issues of student outcomes and retention).

FOUNDATION — ECOLOGICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL

The campus ecology perspective builds on the foundation provided by the scholarship in ecological and environmental psychology. Grounded within this scholarship is the notion that there is a mutual interdependence among personal and environmental factors in behavior determination. Within this foundational literature, the ecological equation of behavior being a function of both the person and the environment (B=f(P,E)) emerged. This formula was first presented by Kurt Lewin in *Principles of Topological Psychology*. In addition, the ecological/environmental foundational scholarship points to the importance of the physical environment and its particular role in determining human behavior. The following articles represent the ecological/environmental foundation for campus ecology including the contributions from the fields of environmental psychology, ecological psychology, social ecology, and human development.


**FOUNDATION — COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT**

The foundational scholarship pertaining to the college environment establishes the college environment as a unique setting and highlights the importance of established ecological/environmental variables in understanding campus environments. It represents the beginning efforts to both assess and manage the college environment in relationship to student outcomes. Critical to these resources is the early work of Alexander Astin, who brought to the attention of researchers and practitioners in higher education the
importance of the campus environment, and the role it plays in the student experience. The following literature also presents the early formulations that focused on the relationship between students and the campus environment. These resources serve as the foundation for campus ecology as a perspective for student affairs.


**CAMPUS ECOLOGY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The resources in this section present the scholarship directly related to the understanding and development of the campus ecology model and its relationship to the field of student affairs. Included are frameworks relating to the campus ecology model, the ecosystem design process, the conceptions of the campus environment, and the application of the model to the field of student affairs. These references represent the birth of the campus ecology movement.


Banning, J. H. (1992). The connection between learning and the learning environment. In E. Hebert & A. Meek (Eds.), *Children,
learning, & school design (pp. 19-30). Winnetka, IL: Winnetka Public Schools.


**CAMPUS ECOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND DESIGN**

This section of resources pertains to the general application of the campus ecology perspective to the assessment and design processes applicable to the college environment. A number of
different strategies are presented for the assessment of campus environments including the ecosystem design model, the consultation, the application of ethnography, and the employment of surveys. Works included here examine such campus ecology factors as behavioral traces and way finding. This section includes examples of some of the first practical applications of the campus ecology model on college campuses.


counseling psychology (pp. 579-621). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
CAMPUS ECOLOGY AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

The scholarship referenced in this section highlights the importance of the relationship between campus ecology and student development. Campus ecology is not a student development theory, but a method of conceptualizing the processes associated with student development. The following resources not only address the relationship between campus ecology and student development, but also highlight the environmental factors that are important to student development. Environmental concerns are often neglected in a traditional “person” only focused developmental theory, one that only takes into account the “person” element of (B=f(P,E)). The following body of work underscores the importance of the college environment and its transactional relationship with students. A useful definition of traditionally focused development theory along with an ecologically focused perspective can be found in the Banning (1989) article referenced below.


The scholarship presented in this section pertains to the application of the campus ecology perspective within particular organizational settings on the college and university campus. Various methodologies including the ecosystem model and the use of ethnographies are used to evaluate the campus ecology of specific programs, offices, and residential living environments. While this material focuses upon particular campus programs, the strategies for assessment presented within the literature can be applied to other campus programs and organizational settings.
Administrative Programs


Admissions Programs

College Union Programs

Counseling Programs

**Housing Programs**


**Ombudsman Programs**


**Outdoor Programs**


**CAMPUS ECOLOGY AND CAMPUS ISSUES**

The scholarship referenced in this section describes campus ecology as it pertains to different campus issues. In this section, the researcher will find both the theoretical and practical application of the campus ecology model, using various methodologies. A large portion of the work listed here deals with the examination of campus artifacts within the environment and their interaction with students. Campus artifacts are believed to send nonverbal messages to the observer, in this case, students. Using photography, much like an anthropologist would to conduct an ethnography, campus artifacts are captured on film to allow an examination of their content, value, and type. This method has been used to examine campus artifacts and their potential messages of sexism and multiculturalism. Relevant journal articles are referenced below.
Campus Activism
Campus Diversity

First Year Students

Student Involvement

Student Outcomes
**Student Retention**

**SUMMARY**

The body of work associated with the campus ecology movement has been presented within a structure that will allow writers and researchers in student affairs to quickly locate needed foundational material. The intention of this article was not to develop a full integration of the campus ecology scholarship, but to bring it together in one place within a conceptual structure. In addition to
providing a "central location" of the student affairs topics that have been addressed from the campus ecology perspective, the user can quickly see there are many topics yet to be addressed from the campus ecology perspective within the field of student affairs.

Of the many potential topics for the future, two important campus issues would be well served by scholarship designed and implemented from a campus ecology perspective. First, understanding the issues surrounding diversity and how to enhance the campus environment's tolerance and celebration of all kinds of differences is critical to today's higher education. Campus ecology grew out of a 1970s era of "activism for change." The passion associated with these times is again called upon to bring about change in the campus ecology that will enhance the growth and well-being of all students.

Second, a very important current movement within the higher education environment is focus on small learning environments. Freshman interest groups, small living learning groups, first-year seminars are all examples of the focus on small learning environments. Again, these efforts would be well served by scholarship that looks at the developmental and cognitive outcomes of these unique "small learning environments." As the researchers of the future move forward on these two topics, as well as others important in the lives of students, it is hoped the resources and the conceptual structure of this article will familiarize them with the significant work associated with campus ecology.