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Horn, M. & Moesta, B. (2019). *Choosing college: How to make better learning decisions throughout your life.* Jossey-Bass.

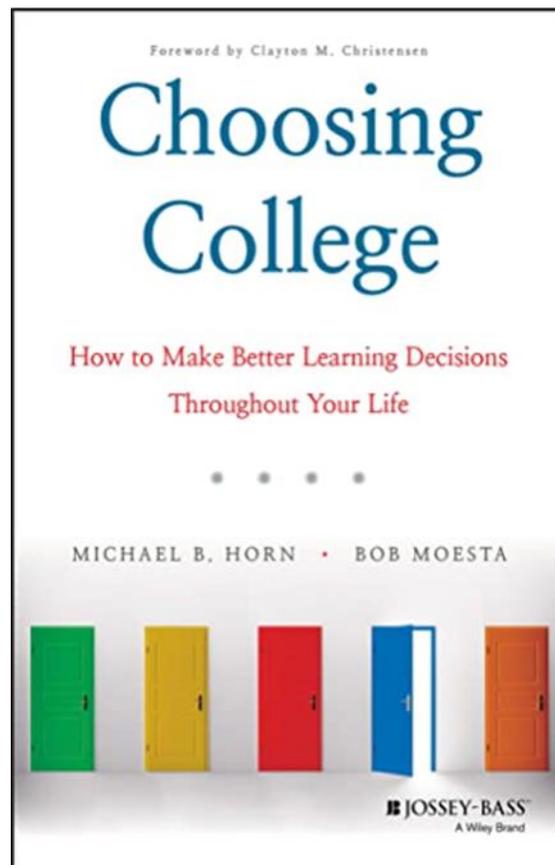
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Reviewed by Tiffany J. Cresswell-Yeager
Gwynedd Mercy University
United States

Choosing College by Michael B. Horn and Bob Moesta offers a new take on the college choice decision-making process. Over the last few decades, authors and researchers have selected various lenses, including psychology, marketing, sociology, business, to view education issues. Using the Jobs to Be Done Theory developed by Clayton Christiansen and Moesta at Harvard Business School, Horn and Moesta use an innovative business approach to examine the decisions prospective college students are making. The authors assert that this theory is not a “blueprint”, but a focus on causation, and not correlation, to get to the heart of the student’s needs and motivations (p. 209). Using this theory, the authors suggest some important options for students, families, and administrators to consider to guide the college choice process.

Horn and Moesta are both Harvard-educated authors who write about disruption in education. Author of *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools* and *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*, Horn focuses on online, blended, and competency-based learning. Much of his



writing centers on transforming schools into student-centered systems. Currently an entrepreneur and consultant, Horn is also co-founder of the Clayton Christiansen Institute for Disruptive Innovation. With Christiansen, Moesta co-created the Jobs to be Done Theory and is a guest lecturer at Harvard Business School, MIT Sloan School of Entrepreneurship, and Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

The Jobs to be Done Theory evolved from the the Disruptive Innovation Framework, as set forth by Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald (2015). This framework asserts disruptive innovations are not opportunities to make products better, but to make them more affordable and accessible to a wider population. Christensen et al note these innovations are often viewed as inferior when they enter the market. Anderson and McGreal (2012, p. 380) argued that education previously was “immune from disruptive technologies”. They argue that “high cost, alumni and governmental support... and the anti-commercial culture of many academies” has allowed higher education to function without accelerated innovation (p. 380). Following this theme of disruption and disruptive innovation, this book is the first to apply the Jobs to be Done Theory to higher education.

The book is divided into four parts, each directed at separate audiences. The first part is for potential students, and it provides an overview of the college choice process and examines data related to college-going behaviors. Despite the challenges associated with college attendance, including rising costs and student debt, the authors provide evidence to support college-going. The bottom line, the authors argue, is that college is still a worthwhile investment. Yet, the decision to attend college should not be made lightly. Directed at parents and students, the second part provides guidance to help students make better choices. The chapters in the third part are written for college and university

leadership to guide them in applying the theory and designing better experiences for students. The fourth part speaks to both student/parent and institutional leadership audiences while providing some opportunities for joint application of the key principles within the book.

The major premise of the book is that the Jobs to Be Done Theory offers a way to predict and explain the behavior of prospective students. Through qualitative interviews, the authors collected data and analyzed themes to create their conceptual model. To illustrate the Jobs to be Done Theory, the authors tell stories of students who had jobs to be done. They assert that institutions should welcome students' honesty and true assessments of why they are making the choices they make. The five jobs in choosing college are:

1. Help me get into my best school
2. Help me do what's expected of me
3. Help me get away
4. Help me step it up
5. Help me extend myself

Help me get into my best school is the job when acceptance to college is the ultimate goal. For example, students who want to “belong to a place with prestige” or “have the classic college experience” fit this category. The authors recommend that students should relax when facing this job because the student will get into a college. In considering student stress levels, the author's no-nonsense approach may be helpful in providing impartial reasoning to an emotional situation. Students can be successful if the focus is on fit, not just on the idea of the best school.

Help me do what's expected of me is a job for students who think college is the next logical step—an expectation from others to attend college. The authors advise students to only apply to schools where they would be excited

to attend. They argue, “don’t add safety schools to your college applications for their own sake unless you would be excited to attend them” (p. 76)

Help me get away applies to students who want to leave home or get a break from the “daily grind”. The authors argue that students should be clear about what it is they are escaping and make sure their choice accomplishes that goal. Again, the authors are clear to suggest low risk, low stakes choices that do not cost a lot of time, energy, or money. The authors contemplate the usefulness of a gap year to learn more about the student’s motivations, goals, and fears. As we continue to face a global pandemic with health and economic impact, this recommendation may be more relevant than ever before. By taking a gap year, students can examine their choices without the pressure to immediately attend school. This gap year and time for reflection about their decisions may better prepare students for the academic and financial implications of their choices.

The final two jobs are quite similar. *Help me step it up* is a job for students who know they need to do better. They feel like “time is running out”. This job offers students the opportunity to evaluate their strengths and their purpose before choosing the right school for them. The authors argue this job requires a “now or never” approach to decision-making. Finally, *Help me extend myself* is a job for students who want to learn more or challenge themselves. This job applies to students who need additional skills, education, certifications, or because they want a change in their current career, occupation, or life. The authors recommend granting yourself permission to try something. Despite the similarities of these two jobs, the authors describe the *step it up* job in more negative terms—now or never, time is running out. The *extend yourself* job is more constructive, with a connection to having time, finding self-acceptance, and challenging students to be the best version of themselves.

In describing these jobs, the authors use the same steps, with a nuanced approach. The authors encourage readers to “know thyself, identify matches, and check and choose” for each job. Each topic provides some suggestions for uncovering the student’s motivation and the authors offer a section on how to be successful. In addition, the book offers advice for a parent or child in this job and two cartoons – “What not to do” and “What to do.” It is a lighthearted take on providing perspective about the pressures placed on college attendance and college choice.

The authors clearly believe a one-size-fits-all approach to college choice is outdated and ineffective. They emphasize the creation of higher education programs that build upon student decision-making and motivation. According to the authors, institutions should be able “help students see when its educational experience is not a good fit for the progress the student is trying to achieve” (p. 190). Rather than waste the student’s resources, the institution should acknowledge when it cannot serve the student. This oversimplified assertion may be problematic. In my experiences, colleges and universities have moved away from telling a student whether or not they can succeed, but rather giving the student the choice to try.

A key point, according to Horn and Moesta, is that institutions need to personalize the student experience and understand what causes a student to enroll. They encourage “institutions to make sure students have at least one preexisting relationship to support them on campus” (p. 195). The authors suggest programs in the first-semester that help determine purpose similar to many colleges’ first-year experience programs. These are both examples of well-researched retention and persistence strategies (Gardner et al., 2002; Kuh, 2008). In addition, they assert that personalizing the student experience requires the restructuring of administrative functions

and processes. They argue institutions should create processes and programs that allow students to do the “job” they are in. Anderson and McGreal (2012) call this the “no-frills” approach and suggest unbundling services. The authors reiterate that institutions need to be honest about their focus and strengths, as well as recognize and admit their weaknesses to be more dynamic in their offerings.

Despite the easy read and logical recommendations, the book is not without weaknesses. Many of the examples represent the business environment, which can be broadly applied to education, but lack some of the specificity in understanding higher education as an institution. In addition, the book lacks an emphasis on social justice and equity that is needed at this time. Underrepresented and marginalized student populations are not examined or explored in

any depth, and at times color-blind language undermines the value of some the recommendations. Finally, the concept of student-as-customer, although important to consider, may cause some concern from critics who oppose the idea of applying a business model to education.

Choosing College allows students, parents, and education leaders to explore the topic of college selection from this new angle. This book would be a great discussion starter or book club selection. Although not every principle or job applies to all students or every circumstance, the book offers a unique perspective worth considering. Higher education will need to adapt to changing demographics, increasing costs, and programmatic shifts, and this book offers a practical guide to education leaders as they begin to address these issues.

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About the Reviewer

Tiffany J. Cresswell-Yeager, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of Higher Education Leadership at Gwynedd Mercy University. She teaches in the doctoral program in educational leadership, specifically in the higher education concentration. With an extensive background in higher education administration, her career spans two decades leading and supervising student services, intercollegiate athletics, and enrollment services.

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