OVERVIEW

**Book Thesis:** Higher education needs to change its testing and grading practices and assign a higher priority to educating students at all levels of academic preparation (p.102)

**Major Themes**

- **The Higher Education Pecking Order (defining excellence)**
  Higher education’s hierarchical system of organization places more emphasis on identifying and acquiring smart students rather than developing smartness in students (p. 7)

- **Medical Care Analogy**
  Astin posits that if hospitals operated like higher education institutions, the top hospitals with the best resources would seek only the healthiest patients to maintain their elite status. Instead, higher education institutions should judge their excellence on their ability to contribute to their students’ learning (condition), not solely on their smartness (health) (p.43)

- **Educational Effectiveness (value-added)**
  The capacity of a college or university to develop (add value) to its students’ knowledge and skills (p.45)

- **Faculty Culture (the core of the problem)**
  Faculty members’ shared belief that smartness is important exerts a tremendous influence on academic practices and campus life (p.86)

KEY WORDS

- **Admissions Madness:** *Student perspective* - the challenge of gaining admission to the most prestigious or most selective college that will accept them; *College/University perspective* - enrolling the smartest possible freshman class. (p.35 & p. 36)

- **Faculty Culture:** the shared beliefs, the common core values and principles that shape how faculty conduct their teaching, research, and collegial relationships. (p.3 & p.100)

- **Smart/Smartness:** Intelligence, brilliance, creativeness, talent, knowledge. In his book, Astin argues that while “smartness” is important and useful, university faculty members have come to value being smart as more important than developing smartness. (p.1 & p. 4)

- **Underprepared Students:** refers to students who earn relatively low scores on standardized tests and relatively low GPAs in secondary school (p.125)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think are the main take-away points from the book?
- What are some points that you agree with, what are some points that you disagree with?
- What do you think about Astin’s medical care analogy? Do you think universities are only interested in the “healthiest” aka “least sick” students?
- Do you think it is realistic or feasible for universities to assess a student’s learning? If so, how?
- Astin discusses the “challenge to educational equity” in chapter 4. How do you think we can make the university experience more equitable? What systemic barriers need to be removed?