

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of Appalachian students at a large urban community college to understand the impact of culture, values, and identity on their ability to persist. Understanding these dynamics enables college faculty and staff to design strategies and services that best meet the needs of this student population.

Abstract

Urban Appalachian college students (UACS) face cultural and institutional barriers that impact their ability to persist and complete college. Designed to explore UACS experiences at a large urban community college, this study provides insight into Appalachian culture and identity and how these impact success in higher education. UACSs are more likely to come from a low-income family, and be the first in their family to attend college. First-generation college students more often lack the social and cultural capital needed to successfully navigate college, further increasing the risk of failure (Bradbury, 2009).



Method and Measurement

Research methodology used is qualitative, providing an opportunity for contextual exploration into the experiences of urban Appalachian college students.

Overarching Questions: How have culture, values, family and identity influenced their experience? How academically or socially prepared were they upon entering college? What has been their greatest challenge with being in college? What is their level of campus connection? What pushed them to continue?



Future Directions

Participants in this study were predominantly second-year students, and beyond, and had overcome new-student hurdles. An expanded study of first-year students, delving into new-to-college experiences, would be beneficial. Recommendations for professionals include deepened understanding of community in order to serve an increasingly diverse student population. For colleges serving urban Appalachians, increased awareness of culture, identity, and history, will increase opportunities to build relationships with this growing student population, and their families.

Influences



Background

For urban Appalachians the challenge is bridging the gap for a community that traditionally has not accessed higher education (Philliber, 1981). Education attainment levels are much lower in the Appalachian region, which is also reflected in urban Appalachian communities outside of the region (Shaw, 2005). Cultural values, characteristics and experiences influence the UACS's ability and willingness to connect with institutions.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the University of Dayton, Drs. Schaller, Welkener & Razek, and my graduate peers. Also to my Appalachian family and friends, and the students who humbly and courageously shared their stories with me. All of you have taught me more than you will ever know.

Results

Culture

- Silent Identity
- Appalachia is "home"
- Influence of Migration
- Negative Stereotyping
- Value people and relationship to others
- Education has its place

Family

- Family comes first
- Push-Pull with education
- Impact on relationships
- Independence
- Historical events influence career choice
- Respect of ancestors and rural Appalachia life

Education

- First-generation college students
- Not seeking "traditional" college experience
- Greatest challenge related to fear of failure and time away from family
- Minimal use of campus resources

References

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