Research Spotlight

2372 - Improve Retention by Increasing Sense of Belonging in First-generation, Non-traditional Transfer Students
Special Populations, Transition Programs and Services

Through qualitative phenomenological research, this study provided an understanding of how first-generation non-traditional transfer students developed a sense of belonging during the transition between two- and four-year colleges. The study was conducted to provide college administration, staff, and faculty, and first-generation non-traditional transfer students with an understanding of the collective lived-experiences which influenced a sense of belonging in college and provide plausible best practices for the higher education field.

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Sense of Belonging Development
First-generation Non-traditional Transfer Student

NISTS 2022 Conference

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Session Structure

Our agenda

- Who we are (group interaction)
- Brief Background to the study (group reactions)
- Importance of the study (group reactions)
- Emerging Themes (group discussion)
- Best practices (group discussion)
- Questions and conversation
About me

- **15 years of experience** in higher education
  - Build programs focused on the student experience
    - Academic support services
    - Aligned curriculum
  - Before higher education
    - Owned and operated a child day care
    - Owned and operated a cattle ranch (which remains in the family)

- Personal experience and witness of first-generation non-traditional college student sense of belonging development during the transition into college and through the vertical transfer process.
The Research

- Phenomenological
  - First-generation
  - Non-traditional
  - Transfer Student

- Schlossberg's 4S transition theory
  - Self
  - Situation
  - Strategy
  - Support
What the literature tells us

Aligned with the literature, the study found

- Programs of study
- Peers with similar career goals
- Student organizations or activities
- Connectivity with faculty and peer students
- Support from faculty, staff, family, friends, and peers
Why it matters

42% Study at 2-year colleges
29% First-generation
21% are employed
Average age is 28 years
15% are vertical transfers
Emerging Themes

- Self-efficacy
- Knowledge
- Connectivity
- Circumstances
Self-efficacy

- Purpose
- Realized demonstration of maturity
- Experience of academic success
Lack of knowledge surrounding college processes and expectations creates a negative impact on sense of belonging.

- Background and context to the situation
- Factors which intimidated students
- Not-knowing-what-you-don’t-know
- Inability to be self-efficient in locating information and resources
- “Biggest enemy” = lack of knowledge
Connectivity

- Robust/frequent academic feedback
- Networked relationships
- Organic connections
- Negative impacts
Circumstances

- Personal situations
- Career advancement opportunities
- Desire

- World Events
- Access
- Right place, right time

Many businesses focus solely on improving workplace diversity.
Emerging Themes Recap

Incremental accumulation of experiences

- Self-efficacy
- Knowledge
- Connectivity
- Circumstances
Now what?
Best practices for the field.

- Secure safe environment
- Sensitivity training
- Feedback
- Contextualized information
Thank YOU for participating!

Want to continue the conversation? Feel free to contact me at danapentzdissertation@gmail.com


Faseler Schell, R. (2018). The relationship between leadership frames of community college personnel and sense of belonging of community college students (Order No. 10788823) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi]. ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection.

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