

Success in a Big Place: Enrolling and Retaining Our Rural Students

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What do we know?

- First generation and rural college students are considered an at risk population (Schultz, 2004).
- Rural students in comparison to their counterparts have unique circumstances to contend with when making decisions about education and careers (Apostol & Bilden, 1991).
- Rural students are a unique cultural group compared to their urban and suburban peers with a different set of needs (Sutton, 2014).
- Over $\frac{1}{3}$ of US children are educated in rural locations, yet their college attendance and completion rates are behind those of their peers (Sutton, 2014).

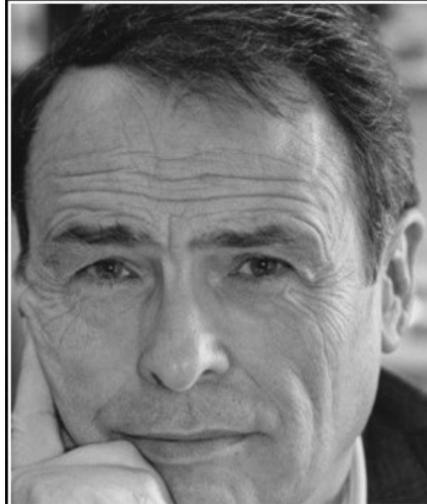
Purpose

Determine factors associated with enrollment and retention of rural students at a land grant university in an urban setting.



Bourdieu and the Forms of Capital

- Economic Capital
- Cultural Capital
- Social Capital



The point of my work is to show that culture and education aren't simply hobbies or minor influences. They are hugely important in the affirmation of differences between groups and social classes and in the reproduction of those differences.

— *Pierre Bourdieu* —

Methodology

- Emails were sent to all students from rural counties to seek participation.
- Face to face semi-structured interview

“Semi structured interviews are a good approach when the researcher has only one opportunity to interview someone and are an appropriate technique when several interviewers will be collecting data for the same project” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 359).

- Total of 56 students were interviewed.
- Interviews recorded and transcribed.
- Responses transcribed and open coded, and categorized

Main Themes

- Support
- Sense of Belonging
- Want to Succeed



Theme 1: Support

“I graduated at the top of my class...I thought I was smart and then struggled here at North Carolina State University. My **advisor** helped me find tutoring, but if it had not been for him, I would have left during my freshman year.”

“Meet **upperclassmen**... they have been here and done that. People who come from small towns to Raleigh are going to go from being a huge important part of their community to a very small fish in a very big pond.”

“It was just the one counselor. It was like I would ask her to do things for me and she would either do them or she wouldn't. Then, I would end up having to figure out what was going on. I just felt like it was a lot of stress for no reason. Two **students** from my school got into NC State and I thought I could do this. “

“My **parents** were super supportive and wanted me to go to college, but also told me they couldn't afford to pay for me to go to college so I had to go where the money was.”

“We have a joke you either go to college or go to Dominos. Because I was able to get the **Parks Scholarship**, I did not go to Dominos.”



Theme 2: Sense of Belonging

“The **Agronomy Club** was made up of individuals like him and this helped me find a family within a big place.”

“I finally put myself out there and just started meeting new people and not being super introverted, like I wanted to be. I love being a **departmental ambassador** and having the opportunity to talk with other students about our program.”

“I do have a sense of belonging on campus, but not in Raleigh. I love what it's taught me, but it's not the place I want to live forever.”

“Back home, my family was the only Jewish family. At NC State, there were other students like me and they became like family.”

“Join the **horticulture club**, join the horticulture club, join it, join it. So that's how I have the friends I do now.”

“I started a **Diabetes 1** club because essentially you can start any club you want. Now I have a support system of people who are like me.”



Theme 3: Want to Succeed

“I chose a major that would not allow me to return home. I want to be able to provide a life for my family and it is nothing in my home community.”

“I did not want to settle, I wanted to do something different, I wanted to do something that my family had not had the opportunity to do.”

“Part of why I want to go into politics was to put some representation for rural people. Nobody really looks out for them.”

“In the end, success is graduating. All of those sleepless nights and hard work paid off. It’s going to count towards the end goal that I am after and that’s what makes it worth it.”

“I was really determined to do well and prove myself that I was actually smart and that I could keep up with the people who went to these bigger schools with more AP credits and stuff like that.”



Conclusions

- Support systems were valuable in helping students achieve success and feeling a **part of the community**.
- All students want to **succeed**. While students may not have a desire to return home, they still want to be successful in college and their future careers.
- Rural students are a **unique cultural group** who have a unique set of needs different from many of their peers.

Recommendations

Universities should:

- Encourage rural students to become involved in a **club organization** their first semester.
- **Create programs** that will allow these students to meet others with similar experiences from rural backgrounds.
- Remind faculty advisors that these students might need more **encouragement**.
- Provide **scholarship opportunities** designed to assist those students from rural areas.
- Utilize rural students as **recruiters** for those rural counties.

Thank You!

