PRACTITIONER AND FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF MOBILE WORKING STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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MWSC Working Students, Succeeding Students

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Describing College-going:
A “new majority” experience

- 75% of college students in the US possess one or more of these characteristics:
  - Are 25 years or older
  - Delayed entry into higher education
  - Attend part-time (50% of college students)
  - Work full time
  - Married
  - Have children

- 80% work during the academic year.

- Because so many students juggle one or more of these characteristics, 60% of bachelor degree recipients attended more than one institution.

Typical focus on lock-step enrollment patterns and traditional student experiences
- Explains comparatively less about students at commuter institutions
- Reflects time lines more typical of traditional student experiences
- Has not generally incorporated qualitative inquiry or students’ own descriptions

Complex relationships between work and student success (Perna, Cooper & Li, 2006; Bradley, 2006; McDonough & Calderone, 2006)

McDonough & Calderone (2006) in particular urged researchers to look at faculty and practitioner norms and expectations, for a fuller understanding of working students educational experiences
Research Questions

- What are faculty and practitioners’ perceptions of working students and their experiences?
- What role do faculty and practitioners view themselves and their institutions playing in the academic success of working students?
Approach to the Study

Focus Today:

Focus Groups and Interviews with 71 Faculty & Practitioners

- Two universities and a multi-campus community college in one metropolitan area
- Applied ethnographic approach (Chambers, 2000)
- Focus groups and interviews
  - 251 Students
  - 71 Faculty & Practitioners (Focus for this presentation)
Theme One: Awareness of Students’ Multiple Roles

• An awareness of the multiple and complex demands working students balance
“It’s a part of their life”

“Going to school is just a part of their lives. It’s not their life; it’s a part of their life. And quite frankly, in many cases, they have other parts of their lives which are more important, or more pressing at least.”

-Faculty Member
“Add those many hours...”

“[Some less-prepared students] think, ‘I’ll take those classes, it’s only two or three days out of the week, I can do that.’ They’re not thinking ahead. They don’t have the perspective of, you take these classes, this is this many hours out of the week, but then you have to tack on one or two hours, three hours per week per class for study time ... And then if you have children, there’s that many hours involved with your children. And if you’re working part-time, then you have to add those many hours on.”

-Student Services Practitioner
Theme Two:
Perceptions of Academic Under-preparedness

• Several participating faculty cited a need for better preparation in reading, writing, math, and study skills, sometimes suggesting deficit-model assumptions or dissatisfaction.

• Some practitioners and faculty members emphasized structural barriers to educational opportunity and school underperformance, referring both to local schools and to patterns they perceived in the U.S. more generally.
“…they don’t understand what it takes…”

“What is prevalent over here is lack of interest. It is like people want to have the degree, but they don’t understand what it takes to get there.”

–Faculty Member
“…There’s…a problem there. . .”

“The students definitely want to complete their studies, but it’s not always possible… because many of them, they can’t; that’s the reality. I don’t know what happened… in the country. ... In the last probably 20 years, ... math was ... not very efficiently taught. I would say that there’s... a problem there, because the students are absolutely afraid of math.”

-Faculty Member
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<th>Theme Three: Connecting with Students</th>
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<td>• Several faculty and practitioners emphasized one-on-one interactions with students and building interpersonal contexts for future interaction</td>
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<td>• Practitioners and faculty developed perceptions of students that were frequently differentiated into two separate groups: traditional-age students, and older, nontraditional students</td>
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“... Build as much as I can. . .”

“One of the things that you have to do ...is I try to build as much as I can in the relationships with students that will permit them to come to me and talk to me.”

-Faculty Member
Comparison to “traditional” students

And then when they leave, they go home to very busy, complicated lives. And I have a feeling that for a lot of them once they leave the parking lot, they have to start thinking about other things unfortunately, not just their courses and whether they understood everything in the lecture they just heard, and how well they did in a class discussion... But that’s different than a traditional student who doesn’t leave campus, who maybe leaves class, goes out and has a cup of coffee with a friend who was in that same class, so they continue to talk and build on the experiences they just had in class. I think that provides certainly a richer learning experience than I’m afraid what a lot of our students have. And in fact, a lot of them I know even when they’re in class have half of their mind on the fact that they have a child at home with a sore throat or they’re about to lose their job, or they don’t know how they’re going to make the rent payment. And bless their hearts, they still come through. But I’m not sure that they have that 100 percent, or 95 percent, commitment anyway that a traditional student who’s on a residential campus has.

-Faculty Member
Implications for Practice

- For Research and Theory
  - Consistent with previous research, this study verifies the importance of climate and supportive environment

- For Policy and Practice
  - There is a need to understand how practitioner and faculty come to perceptions and to provide information about those perceptions.
  - The use of institutional data should better inform and develop more relevant practices among those who interact with students.
  - Consider directions for faculty and professional development activities.
  - Evaluate institutional policies and practices that support faculty and practitioners serving multiple student populations.
Discussion

- How do faculty and practitioner perceptions that the residential experience illustrates more commitment to academics influence interactions with students at commuter institutions?
  - Is this perception based on data?

- Faculty and practitioners beliefs v. data
  - What is needed to help students be more successful?

- How can practitioners and faculty support the relationships students need to succeed?
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