

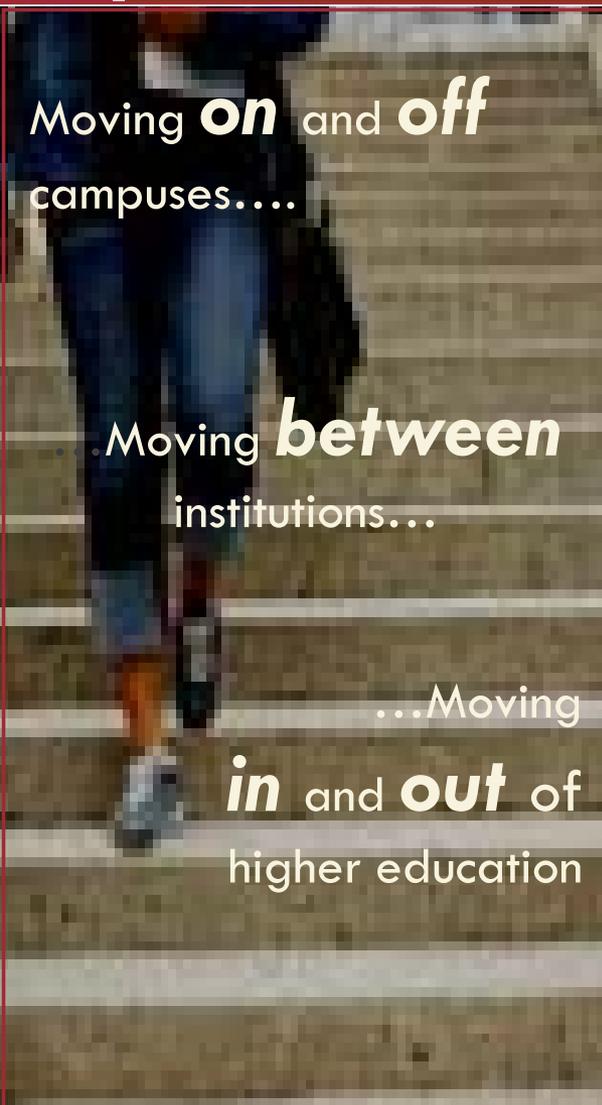
FACULTY & PRACTITIONER VIEWS OF WORKING, COMMUTING STUDENTS: ALIGNING PERSPECTIVES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Describing College-going: A “new majority” experience

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- 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.

Eckels, P.D. & King, J.E. (2008). *An overview of higher education in the United States: Diversity, access and the role of the marketplace*. Washington, DC: ACE.

Literature and Theory: Progress, Critiques, Disjuncture

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- 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

The Crux of the Issue

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- There is a need to understand more about the frames, norms and expectations (funds of knowledge) that faculty and practitioners bring to interactions with students



Research Questions

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- 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

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**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)

Participants

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Participants		
Gender		
	Men	26
	Women	45
	Total	71
Race/Ethnicity		
	African American	24
	Latino/a	10
	White	37
	Total	71

Participants		
Role		
	Faculty	33
	Practitioners	38
	Total	71
Institution Type		
	Community College	37
	Regional University	34
	Total	71

Theme One: Awareness of Students' Multiple Roles

- Working while enrolled as given aspect of students' lives
- An awareness of the multiple and complex demands working students balance

“It’s a *part* of their life”

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“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.”

-University 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.”

- *Community College Student Services Practitioner*

“But that’s different...”

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And then when they leave, they go home to very busy, complicated lives... they have to start thinking about **other things unfortunately**, not just their courses and whether they understood everything ... But that’s different than a traditional student who doesn’t leave campus,

...Even when they’re in class [older students] 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, ...**And bless their hearts, they still come through. But I’m not sure that they have that 100 percent, or 95 percent, commitment** ...that a traditional student who’s on a residential campus has.

- *University Faculty Member*

Theme Two: Perceived Barriers and Strategies for Academic Success

- Several 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.

“Students are ill-prepared...”

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“[M]any of the students have to take remedial courses before they even start to take the courses that they need ...for that degree. So I do feel that the **students are ill-prepared when they come** to the university.”

-University Practitioner

“...There’s...a problem there. . .”

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“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 this 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.**”

-Community College Faculty Member

“...they don't understand what it takes...”

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“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.”

–University Faculty Member

Theme Three: Connecting with Students

- Several faculty and practitioners emphasized one-on-one interactions with students and building interpersonal contexts for future interactions
- Many described of adaptation of practices to develop these connections, or as a result of what was learned from these interactions

“... 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.”

-University Faculty Member

“...it’s our job to help them succeed...”

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“**I’m a lot more flexible** because I want to keep them happy... It’s not our job to keep them happy but it’s our job to help them succeed, and it’s our job to help educate them because I feel really personally responsible if I send them out into the community and [they’re not prepared to perform their job].”

-Community College Faculty Member

Discussion

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- A view on faculty and practitioners' development and use of 'funds of knowledge'
- Norms and expectations sometimes rooted in outmoded views and theory on college experience and student success
 - ▣ Links with social reproduction theory and critiques of predominant models for student retention
- The importance of context for understanding students' experiences with faculty and practitioners on campus

Implications

- 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 practitioners and faculty come to perceptions and to provide information about those perceptions.
 - Institutional data could be used in professional development to better inform relevant practices among those who interact with students.
 - Institutions can evaluate institutional policies and practices that support faculty and practitioners serving multiple student populations.

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