The Impact of Structural Supports on the Success of Students of Color in the K-16 Educational System

Date: November 15, 2019
Time: 4:00-6:00 p.m.
Place: Bayer Bio Lab - Technology Learning Center

Abstract

This collective dissertation contains the efforts of two practitioners in the field of education that possess a shared vision for designing student experiences with the mission of preparing all students for success in secondary and postsecondary education. The researchers believe that by creating structural supports for students in underserved populations, these same students will increase their educational attainment and access to long-term career opportunities. With successful completion of postsecondary education and with increased career opportunities, students can improve their lives, their families' lives and the lives of members of their community.

Unfortunately, the reality is that many students struggle at varying stages along the pipeline from elementary, middle, high school and through college. Many of those affected are students who are traditionally underserved by our nation's education system, including students from low-income backgrounds, underrepresented minorities, and those who are the first generation in their families to go to college.

The researchers believe that attention should be given to building supports that address the social, academic, and financial needs of students which are necessary for students to achieve academic mastery and post-secondary educational attainment. Without strategies to support students in building new skills, nurturing their talents, and maneuvering life's challenges, many will be unable to reach these goals.

The researchers seek to find solutions to inequities experienced by underrepresented groups in the educational system by investigating the impact of interventions at two key transition times in students' educational experience. The first study examines the transition to middle school with a focus on mathematics, and the second study looks at the transition to a four-year university, with attention paid to technology and efforts of increasing community cohesion. The proposed studies will explore barriers faced by students from low-income backgrounds within educational settings. The studies are uniquely connected because they will examine barriers faced by marginalized groups in education and will offer solutions to remove these barriers.

This co-authored dissertation offers a unifying framework in which academic and social support practices go hand-in-hand with increased academic achievement and student success. Each study within the dissertation, however, is anchored in its own axiom of the continuum of educational equity in the K-16 sector. Though the points of interest represent a diverse cluster of perspectives, experiences, and communities, a single thread connects both studies: The impact of Structural Supports on the Success of Students of Color in the K-16 Educational System.

By implementing and examining targeted Structural Supports, the researchers found these efforts to have a significant, positive impact on outcomes at both the middle school and post-secondary level. Both studies saw an increase in sense of agency, self-efficacy, advocacy, and grit amongst marginalized students.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Phyllis Balcerzak, Ph.D. - Chairperson
Matthew Davis, Ph.D.
Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.