Abstract

According to college student demographic data, the majority of undergraduate students are nontraditional. However a larger portion of educational resources are allocated to retain traditional college students. An even smaller portion of resources are allocated for the retention of sub-populations of nontraditional college students, such as Mother-Scholars. Therefore it is imperative for institutions of higher education to understand the needs of sub-populations like Mother-Scholars and adequately apportion resources to increase their retention.

Upon matriculation, Mother-Scholars encounter systemic barriers within their institutions that impede their college persistence. Furthermore, because of their intersectionality, Mother-Scholars have college experiences that foster imposter syndrome and stereotype threat that negatively impact their persistence and retention. Academic advising is viewed as the most effective institutional system to address student retention overall and more specifically, the issues that impede persistence for Mother-Scholars.

This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Critical Constructivism to explore the lived college experiences of Mother-Scholars persisting at a predominantly white institution of higher education and how those experiences, as well as the experiences with academic advising impacted their persistence and retention. In alignment with an IPA study, a small sample size of four Mother-Scholars were interviewed to collect data on the phenomenon. One primary research question guided this study: What are the lived experience of Mother-Scholars’ interaction with the institutional student support service of Academic Advising while persisting at a four-year predominantly white institution of higher education? Three sub-research questions expanded upon the primary research question: 1) How do Mother-Scholars make sense of their experience in college? 2) How do Mother-Scholars think about their experience with the university’s system of Academic Advising? and 3) How do Mother-Scholars experience intersectionality, imposter syndrome, and stereotype threat related to their college experience?

Research findings indicated that positive college experiences with academic advising can improve the retention of Mother-Scholars when elements of appreciative and proactive advising are implemented. Additionally, positive advisor-advisee relationships can reduce student anxiety, fear, and self-doubt that manifest in the forms of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat when Mother-Scholars encounter college-related obstacles engendered by their intersectionality.

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