ADVISING RURAL & SMALL TOWN STUDENTS

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OUTLINE & LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Outline
  • Introductions
  • Rural America, education and definitions
  • Rural community and student characteristics
  • Working with rural students in an academic advising role
  • Resources, questions and references

• After attending this presentation, you should be able to:
  • Summarize common identities, characteristics, barriers, and strengths of college students from rural communities
  • Explain at least two ways to define ‘rural’ as related to place, education, and individuals
  • Identify how common values/backgrounds of rural students may manifest themselves in an advising setting
  • List multiple ways in which higher education professionals can improve interactions with rural advisees, with the goal of increased retention and graduation
  • Explore additional resources related to rural education, people, and places
MY BACKGROUND

• Childhood & Education
  • Monte Vista, Colorado (population ~4,000)
  • 63 students in graduating high school class
  • Western Colorado University
  • Oregon State University

• Professional Experience
  • CU Boulder Engineering
  • Admissions, CU Boulder & Western Colorado University
  • Rural health student advising in Utah
  • Other student affairs roles (10+ years)
DEFINING ‘RURAL’

• U.S. Census
  • ‘Rural’ as any area NOT in an urban area or cluster
    • Urban (50,000+ people)
    • Urban cluster (2,500 – 50,000 people)
    • Rural (less than 2,500 people)
  • As of 2010, 60 million people, or 19% of the US population

• National Center for Educational Statistics
  • Defines city, suburb, town, and rural
  • Rural broken down into ‘fringe,’ ‘distant,’ or ‘remote’ by district
  • 9.3 million U.S. students attended a rural school (2018-19)

• Rural-Urban Density Typology/USDA ERS Rural Urban Continuum Code
  • By county (rural/urban/mixed and metropolitan vs. nonmetropolitan)

• Colorado Department of Education
  • By district (distance from nearest urban center, student enrollment of less than 6,500)

• Self-identification
  • Helpful in advising and qualitative research
RURAL CHARACTERISTICS

• Overall Features
  • Small populations spread over large distances
  • Isolated, tight-knit communities
  • Not ‘built up’ with buildings
  • Slow-paced in lifestyle

• Cultural Nuances
  • Increasing ethnic and racial diversity (21% of rural citizens are People of Color)
    • 8% Hispanic
    • 8% Black
    • 4% Other
    • 1% Asian
  • Traditionally conservative politically
  • Similar values (like religion) across smaller communities
RURAL CHARACTERISTICS

• Spatial Distance
  • Access defined by distance (special privilege)
  • “Urbannormativity”

• Education Deserts
  • 54% of first-year college students attend four-year institutions within 50 miles of their home
  • Only 5% of four-year institutions are in rural places
  • More colleges are located in high income, urban communities

• Adult Bachelor’s Degree Completion
  • 20.2% in rural areas, 34.7% in urban areas (2018)
  • Yet, more rural people are going to college than ever before
RURAL CHARACTERISTICS

• First-Generation Status
  • More likely to be the first in their family to go to college
    • Parents with a 4 year degree+
      • 32.9% in rural communities
      • 35.7% in cities
      • 41.6% in suburbs
    • Parents are shown to be a motivator for college enrollment

• College Choice
  • Smaller campuses over larger campuses
  • Two-year institutions over four-year institutions
  • Public institutions over private institutions
  • Less-selective over more-selective institutions
  • Desire for small class sizes, close faculty-to-student ratio, campus support services, engagement opportunities, and financial assistance
RURAL CHARACTERISTICS

• Academic & Co-curricular Experiences
  • Less access to AP coursework, concurrent enrollment
  • Higher high school graduation rates
  • Benefits of smaller secondary schools
  • Difficulty in recruitment/retention of teachers and guidance counselors
  • High co-curricular participation in limited activities

• Low Income
  • Average U.S. rural household per-capita income - $42,993 (compared to $58,693 for urban) (2019)
  • 46% of rural students qualify for free & reduced lunch
  • May be unaware of financial options and scholarships
COLLEGE ENROLLMENT & RETENTION

College Enrollment Rates in the First Fall After HS Graduation, Class of 2019

- Urban Schools: 61%
- Suburban Schools: 66%
- Rural Schools: 60%

Persistence Rates from 1st to 2nd Year of College, Class of 2017

- Urban Schools: 83%
- Suburban Schools: 87%
- Rural Schools: 82%

College Completion Rates, 6 Years after HS Graduation, Class of 2013

- Urban Schools: 37%
- Suburban Schools: 47%
- Rural Schools: 41%
COLLEGE ENROLLMENT & RETENTION

• Rural students are enrolling in college at higher rates than ever, yet still enroll in, and graduate college at lower rates than urban and suburban peers (Wells et. al, 2019).

• Students going to college immediately after high school in fall 2020:
  • -6.8% for all schools
  • -7.5% for urban schools
  • -6.1% for suburban schools
  • -7.5% for rural schools
THESIS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

• Unexpected Emotional and Social Transition to College
  • Fear, nervousness, and surprise in tough transition from high school
  • Large adjustment due to lack of knowledge of what to expect

• Motivations for Enrolling in College
  • Parental support and mentors, career-driven

• Lack of Social and Curricular Involvement
  • Difficulty making friends, forming social connections
  • Overly involved in high school, but under involved in college

• New Exposure to Diversity and Consciousness of a Rural Identity
  • For often the first time, identified as ‘rural/small town’
  • Exposed to new diversity of people, thought, culture
COMMON VALUES & STRENGTHS

• “Many rural students still persist, often not in spite of their rural identities, but because of them” (Yenney, 2020, p. 30)
• Hard-working, experience overcoming adversity
• Tight-knit community capital (and often aspirational capital)
• Innovative/engineering mindset in ‘making things work’
• Focus on career outcomes
• Used to being in a space with people of similar values and mindsets
• Experience living in marginalized spaces
• Flexibility in navigating a new (often larger) college environment
• Often the ‘first’ (in their family to go to college, to leave their hometown)
• Bring their own culture, background to college spaces
ADVISING RURAL STUDENTS

• Identifying rural advisees
  • Campus Information Systems
  • Simply ask!
  • Self-identification
  • Never heard of the town? Google it!
Rural Students: Impact of Advising

• Focus groups (26 self-identified rural students) from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (Yenney, 2020)

• Themes of the impact of academic advising on rural students’ sense of belonging in college
  1. Take time to develop rapport
  2. Set (and revisit) clear expectations
  3. Incorporate positive feedback

• Understanding individual experiences through asking (Cain & Smith, 2020)
  • What are the individual characteristics of these students?
  • What are their family, school and community backgrounds?
  • What are the unique college needs of these students?
ADVISING RURAL STUDENTS: QUESTIONS TO ASK

• Where are you from (or simply, tell me a little about yourself)?
  • Or even better, “I see you’re from _____” and then lead into other questions
• How was your transition from ‘_____’ to (insert campus)?
• What interests you in ‘insert major’?
• What are your summer plans?
  • Are you headed back home to ‘insert home town’ for the summer?
• How has the transition to online coursework been? Do you have reliable internet at your house?
• Tell me about how you’ve found community on campus.
• How are your parents adjusting to you being away from home?
• What are your questions about financial aid or paying for college?
ADVISING RURAL STUDENTS: ADVISOR TIPS

• Get students connected early to social, tight-knit communities
  • Residence halls
  • First-year interest groups/courses
  • Intentional mentoring programs

• Define university jargon, acronyms, and terms for rural students
  • Ex. ‘Bursar’s Office’ ‘liberal arts’ ‘first-generation’ ‘research institution’

• These students are used to close relationships with teachers/counselors, so embrace the relationship you may have with them

• Do not assume they have reliable internet in their home communities and provide alternative ways of communication if possible
ADVISING RURAL STUDENTS: ADVISOR TIPS

• Understand the unique barriers to higher education for rural students, as well as the STRENGTHS they bring
  • Recognize intersecting identities and how they influence the college journey
  • Anticipate some distrust towards ‘outsiders’ and really investigate their background and motivation for college
  • Understand transportation, distance, and parking costs may be a substantial barrier for this population
  • Know support services on campus to offer to aid a student’s success

• And most importantly...
  • ‘once you’ve met one rural student, you’ve met one rural student’ so be flexible and individualized in your approach
RURAL RESOURCES

• Rural university support entities
  • CU Boulder Rural Network
  • University of Georgia’s ALL Georgia Program
  • University of North Carolina System’s Strategic Performance Agreements
  • Yale University’s Rural Students Alliance
  • Columbia College Teacher’s College’s Rural Student Group
  • University of Chicago’s Emerging Rural Leaders
  • Swarthmore College’s Rural and Small Town Students
  • College Assistance Migrant Programs (CAMP), TRiO, Upward Bound
RURAL RESOURCES

- Recent rural education literature
  - **Ardoin, S. 2018** – Rurality, socioeconomic status, college jargon
  - **Cain, E. J. & Smith, N. L.** – CRT lens on rural college students
  - **Chambers, C. R. 2020** – College conversations in rural spaces (Ch. 13)
  - **Crain, M.C. & Newlin, M. (2021)** – Rural first-gen students
    - Great student/advisor case study example of urbannormativity
  - **Ganss, K. M. (2016)** – Rural Oregon first-year college students
  - **Koricich, A., Chen, X., & Hughes, R. P. (2018).** – Rurality and socioeconomic status effects on college choice
  - **Means, D., (2019)** – Rural African American Students
  - **McNamee, T. (2019)** – Rural student social capital
  - **Sansone, V. A., et al. (2020)** – Race, ethnicity and residential location (urban vs. non-urban) in Texas
RURAL RESOURCES

- **Rural-serving Institutions (RSIs)**
  - Definition in development, Alliance for Research on Regional Colleges (ARRC)

- **Campus Compact RSI Affinity Network**

- **Rural & Small Town Special Interest Group**
  - Free to join!
  - Rural resources, research & literature drive

- **Why Rural Matters Report**
  - State-specific data on rural secondary schools

- **Interactive map** of ‘education deserts’ by zip

- Slack channel of rural researchers (email Karen for the link)
Parting Thoughts

“It is possible that a rural student might fall into [another underrepresented] category, qualifying them for additional support. However, given what we know about the rural student experience in college, those in positions of leadership should work to include rurality as a basis for support services, regardless of other identity markers such as military status, race, or class.”

(Yenney, 2020, p. 33)
REFERENCES


Chambers, C. R. (2020). Let’s give ‘em something to talk about: Spurring college conversations among rural students, schools, and families. In H. C. Green, B. S. Zugelder, & J. C. Manner (Eds.), Handbook of research on leadership and advocacy for children and families in rural poverty (pp. 279-294). IGI Global.


REFERENCES (CONT.)


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