

STRAIGHT OUTTA THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE: STUDENTS THROUGH A RURAL LENS

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NACADA 2021
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Academic Atmosphere

- Rural students often had strong relationships with faculty and staff, so **larger class sizes means less personal contact** with faculty and instructors. ^(5,10)
- Rural communities are limited in academic or career paths, so **rural students may feel overwhelmed by the number of academic options.** ⁽⁵⁾
- Rural students **may not be as academically prepared as their peers.** ⁽⁸⁾
- Rural students often see higher education as a path to prosperity, but **may feel pressure from families and communities to do well or choose a certain major.** ^(1,6,8)

Economic Factors

- Distance to universities plays a role! **Access to recruitment or early college access programs may be limited** because of extensive travel and expense.
- Rural students are frequently first generation students, often meaning they have a **lack of parental knowledge and support, including financial support.** ⁽¹⁰⁾
- **Rural areas lag behind in economic growth**, leading to lower family incomes and wages. Rural students tend to enroll in public colleges and community colleges because **tuition is more affordable.** ^(2,7,10)
- **Knowledge about financial aid may be limited**, including how to navigate financial aid systems. ^(6,7)

Cultural Adjustments

- Students **often feel pressure to “go away” to college** from parents, family, and community. This could affect their choice in major or program and career path. ^(5,7)
- The size of campus and navigating in new areas is intimidating! ^(5,10)
- **Fears of urban problems** (safety, crime, homelessness, traffic, resources, etc) can discourage students from exploring campus and their new community. ⁽⁵⁾
- Rural areas are often homogenous, both culturally and racially, so **changes to cultural diversity** may be overwhelming. This could lead students to transfer to other schools where they feel they fit better. ^(5,10)
- **Rural students who are more likely to attend college often held leadership roles** and were highly involved in their high school and communities. Knowing how to get involved can be daunting. ⁽⁵⁾
- **Changing hobbies or entertainment** can be difficult and expensive, burdening students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Parental attitudes and assumptions about higher education** play a significant role in students' retention and persistence. ^(1,2,10)
- Students may have **the fear that leaving for education and a career means leaving their homes for good.** ^(6,7)

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Connection to Advising:

Help students sort through the reasons they are there, including both academic reasons as well as familial or cultural expectations.

Encourage and guide students through **exploring academics, careers, and hobbies**.

Creating connections to campus is key! Students who travel home more often can impose a financial burden and leads to transfer or dropout.

Longer orientation programs and opportunities to become familiar with campus are very helpful! **Learning to navigate large campuses** can make a large difference and help students know what to expect.

Joining activities and clubs build social capital, giving students a sense of community and leadership.

Build rural students' knowledge of campus support resources, such as counseling, tutoring, food banks, etc. These resources may not be available in their own community.

Coach students on **how to approach and connect with faculty**. This will help strengthen their academic connection with campus.

Help your students need to **strike a balance between home and college life** and relationships.

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