

Formal Research Proposal
Exploring the Conceptions and Misconceptions of Retention Rates of Underrepresented Students
at Predominately White Institutions

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Since World War II colleges and university have attempted to become more inclusive and diverse within their environments. Colleges and universities are the hub of student learning, growth, and development. The number of underrepresented students attending institutions of higher education is constantly increasing. Within the constant increase, institutions are finding it difficult to retain these students. Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2004) note that students of color tend to leave colleges and universities at a higher rate than other students. There is a lack of underrepresented students being retained at predominately White institutions.

Previous research on retention rates of underrepresented students has focused mainly on the retention framework theory and pre-freshman programs. Many studies have linked underrepresented student leaving, due to lack of role models and mentors whom also identify as underrepresented. Numerous studies have examined those students who participate in pre-freshman summer programs seem to have a positive effect on retention rates (Maggio, 2005). Fewer studies focused on the psychology of the student's mental process and their experiences at a predominately White institution.

Minimal research attention has been directed toward the retention theory aspect and how underrepresented students fit into that theoretical construct. Many students' are not properly being socially and academically prepared to be successful students in college and universities. Often students feel isolated and they do not connect with the mainstream campus community. Due to the multi different background types some underrepresented students are not academically prepared.

Existing studies of retention rates of underrepresented students use both quantitative and qualitative research, but most focus is on the retention rates but there is not focus on the experiences of the students. Qualitative investigations provide the detailed views of students in their own words. These complex analyses help to show multiple perspectives and experiences. This type of research offers the chance to reflect on decisions and students views on particular types of programs and institutions.

By examining these various theories, programs, and student experiences we are able to better examine the misconceptions and understand the conceptions of the retention rates of underrepresented students at predominately White institutions. Through this research constituents of the institutions will be able to better examine their programs and retention efforts. Also there will be a better understanding of the various variables and develop theoretical models about retention rates. The purpose of this proposed study is to determine what type of theory, programs, and experiences make a positive impact on the retention rates of underrepresented students.

Research Questions of Hypotheses

- What is the retention rate of marginalized students at predominately White institutions?
- What are common experiences of students who are not retained at the institution?
- What programs are place on the campus to help retain underrepresented students?

I am conducting a mix methods research so my hypothesis only somewhat applies. I believe that with proper implementation of programs and theoretical constructs the institution will be able to better implement retaining underrepresented students.

Review of the Literature

Emiliano et al (2005) examined the retention framework theory and used that to determine how this would affect students of underrepresented population. The article argued that contemporary social integration and multicultural theories of student retention do not adequately address the academic needs of underrepresented students. There was a deep discussion and review of student-initiated retention projects (SIRPs) (Emiliano et al 2005). The article served as a starting point for the current research. Emiliano et al (2005) also noted on implementing student-initiated retention projects which are very unique and new to many institutions. Emiliano et al (2005) argues that current social integration and multicultural theories of student retention theory do not adequately address the various needs of underrepresented students at predominately White institutions. Emiliano et al's (2005) study focused on how one can reform the student retention theory to better focus on students of underrepresented groups, this reformation would be done through student-initiated retention projects. Emiliano et al stated that the three key components of the student-initiated retention projects would be "developing knowledge, skills, and social networks; building community ties and commitments, and challenging social and institutional norms"(p.605; 2005). The research establishes a connection between the institution and students and show the interactive relationship between the student and various facets of the social and academic spheres.

Maggio (2005) offered various implications and what institutions are doing to fix the problem of services being provided to underrepresented students. The study identified which pre freshman summer program characteristics and pre collegiate student characteristics had an effect on college CPA and student retention. The findings of the study helped to revealed that high school CPA had a direct positive effect and program size and program length had direct negative

effects on college CPA. Maggio (2005) offered tips to improve retention. It also looked at how backgrounds really affect retention rates as well. The research focused on classroom situations and how that affects the retention rates as well. The research gave insight of what to do and where to search for other research to help me through this process.

Tinto (2006) focused on retention rates now and then. The research focuses on promoting success of underrepresented students. The study looks at the concerns and issues of institutional actions and how to implement these programs. Tinto(2005) identifies where the lack of research is within the topic. Rodgers (2008) focuses on the psychology of the students' mental processes and retention efforts. Rodgers (2008) focuses on identity development theories and used them to conceptualize the mental processes of underrepresented students. Rodgers (2008) explains the pre-freshman programs that will be most effective based on the mental processes of the underrepresented student.

Jones (2002) focuses on the actual student experience at predominately White institutions. The purpose of Jones study was to examine "the experiences of ethnic minority students at a predominately White institution, to discuss the similarities and differences of the experiences among the four groups, and to identify student perspectives on the delivery of student services in the institution" (19, 2002). Jones (2002) conducted a qualitative study that focused on exploring the college student experience of underrepresented students in higher education institutions.

Research Design

The research design I will be using is the explanatory design. This design places an emphasis on the quantitative research and uses qualitative research to help further explain the initial quantitative research. Whether a student is retained at an institution is based on various aspects. The explanatory design allows the opportunity to explain all of these aspects of student retention.

Method

Participants

The students I will be focusing on will be sophomore students at the institution. I will collect demographic data on the institution to help find students which whom to interview and study. My participants will be a small group of sophomore students whom identify as underrepresented students. The different types of students will be half who were involved in a retention program and those who are not. Using sophomore students will help to answer the retention questions of why they continue on at the institution after their first year.

Data Sources

Quantitative data will be obtained from the sophomore students within the institution. There will be a survey of questions to audit the retention courses and experiences within the course. Demographics will be obtained from the institution to help show the amount on underrepresented students within the institution and how many underrepresented students were retained from the first to second year. Also this quantitative data will show which students

participated in retention programming and which did not. The survey will serve as an outline to help form the questioning for the qualitative interviews.

The next step will be qualitative detailed interviews. These interviews will focus on the students' experiences within the institution and why they choose to remain at the institution. These detailed questions will also focus on the students experiences either participating or not participating in retention programming. This research will help to gain insight and help define some of the misconceptions of underrepresented students within a predominately White institution.

Procedures

My first step would be gaining demographics from the institution. I will gain demographics on the entire campus community, but the second year class as well. Through this data I will be able to determine the amount of underrepresented students within the institution and within the second year class. I will then be able to take this data and see the amount of underrepresented students retained from the first to second year. I will also gain access to see what students participated in retention programs (i.e. summer bridge programs, first year experience course, etc.) also learn about student who did not participate in these courses. I would send out information out to second year students who identified as underrepresented students to gain an equal amount of students who participated in retention programs and those who did not.

After gaining my participants I will administer a survey to the students. The survey will be administered to the students in a quiet room where they will be able to give their full attention to the survey. Students who were in the same course will be able to be in the same room to be

able to reflect on their experiences. Following the survey we will analyze the survey and come up with some common themes from the survey.

We will then conduct detailed interviews with each participant. These questions will focus more on the students' experiences and why they remained at the institution. The questions will be opened ended and conducted by a research team member either in person or over the phone. The interviews will last about one hour to an hour and a half. The interviews will then be coded, looking for common themes then analyzed with the quantitative data.

Validity

Aspects of validity that come into question with my research is descriptive and interpretive validity. By using interviews to conduct part of my research I am opening up to participants experiences. These participants could possibly be basing their information off of misinformation instead of their own information. This would really damage the validity of my information. Also because of the interviews my interpretive validity is called into question. Half of my study is based off of perceptions, opinion, and experiences of participants which means that all the results could vary due to the fact that all their experiences were interpreted differently. Participants may have experienced events differently based on the context and not on being an underrepresented student.

References

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