Understanding Financial Pressures on the Experiences of Community College Students

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Agenda

- Overview of the study
- Large group discussion
- Implications for your work
- Wrap up
Purpose of the Study

Purpose was to investigate financially strapped community college students, their academic and social engagement at their institutions and success in terms of persistence and transfer to a 4-year institution.
Research Questions

- How does significant unmet financial need impact community college students' persistence in college, academically, socially, and financially?
- How do these students make choices about involvement and engagement within college?
- By making the choices they make, how does it affect the student’s college experiences?
A Backdrop to Understanding Financial Pressures
Literature

- **Jill Biden’s Work to Promote the Community College**
  - Photo Credit: Kevin Lamarque / Reuters

- **Obama 2020 Vision:**
  - To have the world’s largest share of college graduates

- **The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)**
Community College Students Respond

Q: Should community college be free?

Yes, for those seeking education that can't afford it.

Yes, already receiving Pell Grants.

Yes, make it affordable.

Stop being greedy. Make it work once to get some money.

Nothing is free!

Yes. If we're getting these grades it should be.

Should you pay for it?

Yes - it's a nice thought in theory but may never happen in practice.
Grabbed from the Headlines

  - “Many low-income community college students struggle with balancing a full course load and working to take care of financial responsibilities outside of school” (p. 10)
The Need and Meaning of Work as a Student

- Obviously financial obligations, but sometimes to not have loans, for experience, future salary considerations, and for ego sheltering.
  - Tannock & Flocks (2003). "I know what it's like to struggle": The working lives of young students in an urban community college.
    - The importance of the identity as a “student” while working in low-end jobs.
  - Lynch, Gottfried, Green & Thomas (2010). Using economics to illuminate the dynamic higher education landscape.
  - Park & Sprung (2013). Work-school conflict and health outcomes: Beneficial resources for working college students.
Academic and Social Engagement

Grades
- Differentiation in on/off campus work. OC more related to better GPA for full time 1st year students, if working 10 hours or less, somewhat less so for 20 hours OC. Off campus work more negatively related to GPA.
- Levin, Montero-Hernandez & Cerven (2010). PT CC work more related to persistence (grades ≥ C)

Campus Community
- Flowers (2010). Effects of work on African American college students' engagement.

Enculturation with Faculty/Higher Ed Culture
- Soria & Stebleton (2013).
- McCormick, Moore & Kuh (2010).
- Umbach, Padgett & Pascarella (2010). Impact of working on undergraduate students' interactions with faculty.
Transferring to a 4-Year from Community College: #shepersisted

- **Persistence and dreams of upward mobility**
    - “Working part time does not appear to have the same detrimental effects as full-time work on persistence for community college students [...] among those who work part time, there is a higher level of college persistence (59.2%) than for those who did not work at all” (p. 52) However, “only 44.1% of CC students working FT persist relative to 61.6% of 4-yr college students working FT” (p. 52).
  - Nielsen (2015). "Fake it 'til you make it": Why community college students' aspirations "hold steady".
Transferring to 4-Yr from CC: #shepersisted

- **Persistence and dreams of upward mobility**

  - Suggested few state transfer agreements or community college characteristics were sig. related to upward transfer w/in 6 years but...

  - **Student characteristics related to upward transfer:**
    - Intention for upward transfer at entry
    - Attend full time
    - Work between 1-19 hrs/week
    - Declaring a transfer-oriented major in STEM, Arts & Social/Behavioral Sciences, or Education
Our Study

• Interviewed 9 men and 11 women across 2 institutions

• Each student was interviewed twice – one during their first semester and one close to the end of the semester
Participants

- First time, first year (18-24)
- Intention to transfer
- All receiving financial aid (no dependents)
- Full time student with a part time job – job varied from campus to off campus work
- Administered a survey to targeted courses – 55 students completed, invited 35 and 20 agreed to participate
Data Collection

- First interview – face to face, open ended, semi-structured
- Each lasted approximately 60 minutes
- Follow up interview was conducted via the phone and lasted 5-10 minutes – the goal was to find out if their plan was to return a 2nd year to the college – all were planning to return
Phenomenological study – phenomenon was the experience of being financially strapped in college - balancing academic, work, and college experience

Constant, comparative technique used with interview transcriptions
Findings

• Value of the degree
• Balancing school and work
• Resources on campus
• Conflict about role in college
Reflection and Application

What are you seeing in the population of students you work with?
Reflection and Application

- What does this mean for your work?
For the Benefit of the Whole...

- Reporting out
- Implications for your work
- How do I take this back to my campus?
Questions?

Thank you!