

Title

Student, major; Mentor, department

Research Statement

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences, achievements, and aspirations of undergraduate students at USC who previously attended secondary school in a rural community.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goal of this study is to explore the precollege and college experiences of undergraduate students at USC from rural communities and how these may shape their postsecondary aspirations, college enrollment, and college completion. Objectives are as follows: gain more knowledge of and skills in qualitative research, gain knowledge of relevant issues from previous research on rural youth, conduct interviews with undergraduate students at USC who are from rural communities, analyze interview data, and share results.

Project Significance

Improving college enrollment and completion is a national priority (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2011). Though rural youth are increasingly attending college, rural youth are less likely than urban and/or suburban youth to enroll in and complete college (Byun et al., 2011; Provasnik et al., 2007). Yet, little is known about the precollege and college experiences of rural students or how these may shape their postsecondary aspirations, enrollment, and completion (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, in press). Therefore, studying these experiences among undergraduate students at USC from rural communities is needed. Such research may be especially informative for our university and state because South Carolina has one of the largest and fastest growing proportions of rural youth in the nation (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012).

Background

A significant portion of education research has focused on urban youth, often leaving rural youth unaddressed (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). Rural youth face a unique set of challenges including geographical isolation, limited community resources, and less access to advanced courses. On the other hand, the school is often the center of activity, involvement, and interaction in rural communities. Coupled with a smaller population, this often leads to strong student-teacher relationships but such ties may lead rural youth to not want to pursue a college education. Specifically, previous literature has found that the educational aspirations of rural youth are lower than non-rural youth. This may be because the employment opportunities near their home communities (e.g., agriculture or resource extraction) do not require a post-secondary education or because rural youth prefer to maintain their connection to their family and community (Elder & Conger, 2000; Howley, 2006). Nonetheless, rural youth are increasingly pursuing a college degree but little research has involved rural youth who are enrolled in college (Byun et al., 2011). By studying the pre-college experiences and aspirations of undergraduate students from rural communities who enroll in college we may obtain a greater understanding of how such factors intertwine and lead to college enrollment. By studying the college experiences of undergraduate students from rural communities we may obtain a greater understanding of key factors that could lead to or possibly interfere with college completion.

This project builds on research [mentor] has undertaken to examine the precollege (i.e., secondary) schooling experiences of high school youth from rural communities (Irvin et al., 2011). This project also builds on the research [mentor] and his colleagues have completed on the postsecondary experiences of college students from rural communities (Byun et al., 2011; Byun et al., in press). These studies used large-scale national data sets that allowed for comparisons with urban and suburban youth. However, large-scale national data sets have substantial breadth but relatively little depth. Therefore, interviews with college students from rural communities will provide a more in-depth exploration of precollege and college experiences that may affect their enrollment in and completion of college.

Project Design

The first month of the research will involve obtaining more knowledge of qualitative research, and, specifically, conducting individual interviews. I will build upon my knowledge base of introductory statistics, having taken two courses (STAT 110 and STAT 201) through which I acquired some experience with qualitative statistics, using statistical software, and analyzing data. The first month will also involve increasing my understanding of key issues and findings in previous research on rural youth. [mentor] will provide useful readings to increase my understanding of individual interviews and previous research on rural youth. Following an independent study format, I will read these materials and

discuss them with [mentor] to make sure that I have grasped the information. I will then work with [mentor] to develop interview questions. As a previous journalism major I have experience in both question development and interview technique. During the second month, I will complete in-depth interviews of four USC undergraduate students from rural communities. Participants will be recruited from undergraduate psychology courses. As a psychology minor I have experience reading and interpreting case studies, which similarly emphasize the individual. Additionally, I have personally implemented interview style research that focused on family background and applied this information to write a research paper. I will follow the three-interview series model to check for accuracy and consistency in participants' responses and stories (Seidman, 2006). The three interviews will be completed with each participant over the course of one month. The interviews will be recorded and afterwards I will transcribe them into a word processing program. During the third month, I will analyze the data with the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. [mentor] will provide me online and other sources for learning how to use NVivo. After I have become familiar with NVivo, I will analyze the data and then compare my findings to literature on the subject. My ability to comprehend and apply the literature comparatively will be enhanced by an education course (EDFN 300) that I am presently enrolled in which focuses on the reading and interpretation of academic journals/scholarly articles. Finally, the results of these four individual interviews will be shared by means of a poster presentation at Discover USC and preparation of a manuscript for publication in a peer-reviewed journal such as *Journal of Research on Rural Education*.

Project Timeline

May: background literature reading; development of interview questions

June: recruit participants; conduct interviews

July: analyze data

August – December: prepare poster and manuscript for publication

January – April: present research at Discover USC/SFER meeting/alma mater; begin thesis

Final Products and Dissemination

Upon completion of this research I plan to pursue publication with the guidance and assistance of my mentor. The processes and evidence from this study will also contribute to the writing of my Senior Honors Thesis, which I intend to focus on rural education. In addition to presenting my findings at Discover USC, I also intend to share this research with my alma mater – a high-poverty rural school district. Another outlet for presentation of my findings may be at a meeting of USC's newly founded Students for Education Reform club. I anticipate that this project will spur my participation in several others involving rural education, specifically in South Carolina where there is opportunity for great impact.

Personal Statement

I grew up in a rural town in southwestern Pennsylvania. My high school of less than 400 students had a poverty rate of approximately 20%. Both of my parents, as well as my maternal grandfather, graduated from this same district. Thankfully my family is not part of that 20% and I was always encouraged by my parents to do well in school and attend college. Far too many of my classmates were not as fortunate as I have been – welfare dependency, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school are not unusual fates in my hometown. Because of this background, my career interests (which combine psychology, teaching, and reform policy), and a sincere passion for education I am very eager to study rural schools and their students.

References Cited

- Byun, S-Y., Irvin, M. J., & Meece, J. L. (in press). Predictors of bachelor's degree completion among rural students at four-year institutions. *Review of Higher Education*.
- Byun, S-Y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J., & Hutchins, B. C. (2011). Rural-nonrural disparities in postsecondary attainment revisited. *American Educational Research Journal*. published online before print July 29, 2011, doi: 10.3102/0002831211416344
- Elder, G. H., Jr., & Conger, R. D. (2000). *Children of the land: Adversity and success in rural America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
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- Irvin, M. J., Meece, J. L., Byun, S-Y., Farmer, T. W., & Hutchins, B. C. (2011). Relationship of school context to rural youth's educational achievement and aspirations. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40, 1225-1242. doi:10.1007/s10964-011-9628-8
- Provasnik, S., KewalRamani, A., Coleman, M. M., Gilbertson, L., Herring, W., & Xie, Q. (2007). *Status of education in rural America* (NCES 2007-040). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Strange, M., Johnson, J., Showalter, D., & Klein, R. (2012). *Why rural matters 2011-12*. Washington, D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved from <http://files.ruraledu.org/wrm2011-12/WRM2011-12.pdf>

Magellan Scholar BUDGET FORM

Student's Name:

Double-click on table to enter data

Student salary	Hours <small>Enter the estimated number of hours student will work</small>	Rate <small>Enter the hourly wage</small>	Subtotal
Taking classes	240	10	\$2,400.00
Not taking classes			\$0.00
Fringe: Student salary * student fringe rate¹			
Taking classes	\$2,400.00	0.20%	\$4.80
Not taking classes	\$0.00	8.15%	\$0.00
Materials/Supplies	Enter sub-total from below:		\$200.00
Travel	Enter sub-total from below:		\$350.00
TOTAL:			\$2,954.80
Amount requested for MGS award:			\$2,954.80

Budget Justification

Student Salary: Indicate estimated number of student work hours per week during academic year and summer and hourly rate.

I will work on this project for 120 hours during Summer I and for 120 hours during Summer II at the rate of \$10 per hour.

Materials/Supplies: Indicate items, quantity, and estimated price

Digital Voice Recorder	1 x 50.00= 50.00
NVivo software	1 x 150.00= 150.00
	Total= 200.00

Travel: Indicate location, purpose of travel, estimate itemized costs (transportation, lodging, registration, etc).

I am requesting airfare to Bentleyville, Pennsylvania to present my research findings at Bentworth Senior High School. Roundtrip airfare is estimated at \$350 (via kayak.com).