Underserved Student Population: Nontraditional Students

Abstract

40 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are nontraditional students (NTS), but many of the services offered are designed for traditional students (NCES, 2017). How does an undergraduate research office support this growing student population? To answer this question, a literature review was conducted, and the following themes were discovered: barriers to nontraditional student participation, programs designed for NTS, and a gap within the literature of student's perception on participating in UR programs. Before addressing this issue, programs should first conduct an analysis of available data on their NTS to determine if special programs are warranted.

Introduction

49.4 percent of the nontraditional students (persons over the age of 24) from the 2011 cohort did not obtain a degree within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). The reason behind attrition is complex, but many postsecondary institutions have been looking at ways to retain students and ensure they complete their degrees.

Over the past decade, many institutions have instituted 10 High-impact Practices to increase student retention and graduation rates (Kuh, O'Donnell, & Schneider, 2017). According to current findings, undergraduate research has been identified as a HIP with a significant positive impact on traditional college students (Kuh et al., 2017; Johnson & Stage, 2018; Kilgo et al., 2014; Kuh, 2008). Furthermore, student's interaction with a faculty mentor is a major factor as well (Carpi et al., 2017; Prunuske et al., 2016), but there is a deficiency within the literature on how these practices impact NTS.

Methodology

The researcher conducted a literature review of peer reviewed studies conducted over the last 10 years concerning undergraduate research, nontraditional students, and high-impact practices.

Major Themes

Who are NTS
- 24 years or older
- Part time enrollment
- Has dependents
- Work Full time
- Delayed enrollment
(Choy & NCES, 2002; Wyatt, 2011)

Barriers to NTS Participation
- Time & Money
- Value of Involvement on Campus
- Other commitments
(Wyatt, 2011; Choy & NCES, 2002)

Programs Designed for NTS
- Curricular based such as a capstone project
- Students engage in critical thinking while earning credit
(Njumbwa, 2008; Bangera & Brownell, 2014; Gawel & Greengrove, 2005)

NTS Engagement
- Engage within the classroom environment
- Engage faculty in the classroom
- Less engaged on campus due to lack of value
(Nelson Laird & Cruce, 2009; Price & Baker, 2012; Rabourn et al., 2018; Wyatt, 2011)

Recommendations

- Future research on NTS students perceptions of being involved in undergraduate research
- Programs should look at their current student population to see if there is a need for tailored programs.
- Further research on the impact HIPs have on NTS.

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References


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