From the Desk of the Director

The Role of Faculty Mentoring in Teacher Development

The concept of teacher self-efficacy deserves significant attention in the discussion of professional development reform. According to Milner (2002), teachers – particularly new teachers – leave the classroom and the profession due to feelings of powerlessness, ineffectuality, burnout, and inconsequentiality, and all of these characteristics have been in some way been linked to teacher self-efficacy. Instructors who judge themselves to be capable of orchestrating the complex knowledge and skills required to design instruction based on individual students’ needs, taking into account the challenges of a particular teaching context, will likely exert greater effort, persistence, and resilience as a result of stronger self-efficacy belief (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Evidence strongly suggests that mentoring improves the quality of teaching. Beginning teachers often experience isolation, problems of classroom management (particularly with special needs students), concerns regarding student assessment and the lack of student motivation. The National Center for Education Statistics asserts that, “About two-thirds of beginning teachers said that they worked closely with a mentor. In about 7 in 10 of these cases, new teachers were matched with mentors in the same field. The vast majority of mentees (nearly 9 in 10) found their mentors helpful.” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

A well-developed mentoring program for new teachers can contribute to the quality of their practice, not merely their retention in the profession. Such a program could also build the instructional leadership of veteran teachers who serve as mentors, thus serving a career enhancement purpose, thereby engaging all educators in ongoing professional development and program innovation and improvement (The Southwest Educational Development Lab of Austin, TX, 2000).

References


Students Speak Research Institute

The Student’s Speak Research Institute (SSRI) is a student led and student based undergraduate research group that answers the questions that plague Howard University’s campus and its students. The SSRI is advised and supported by the Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation under the group’s Principal Investigator Dr. Gerunda Hughes and is housed by the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs under Dr. Barbra Griffin.

The focus of this newly established group’s effort first project will be Students’ perceptions of effective and ineffective teaching on Howard University’s Campus. The study is being conducted to show the level of teacher effectiveness and its affects on students’ academic achievement, and success rate. The information gathered will help to assess the overall learning environment, teacher effectiveness and the student’s satisfaction in the learning environment.
The study of students’ sense of validation holds promise for understanding college student retention and success, but more research is needed regarding the generalizability and use of the concept. The development of quantitative measures can help facilitate use across student populations in multiple types of institutions of higher education. This present study empirically examines two validation constructs, student perceptions of academic validation in the classroom and general interpersonal validation, in a new nationally available instrument, the Divers Learning Environments (DLE) survey.

Methodology/Analysis

The data source for this study was derived from the pilot administration of the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Data was collected between December 2009 and May 2010 at three community colleges, six public four-year institutions, and five private four-year institutions across the United States. The DLE administration targeted students with substantial familiarity with their respective campuses in order to capture their perceptions of the climate for diversity. This study draws upon the existing research and tests quantitative measures for two hypothesized latent factors, academic validation in the classroom and general interpersonal validation.

Results/Discussion

Confirmatory factor analyses reveal that the DLE items statistically represent latent factors of academic validation in the classroom and general interpersonal validation. The action-oriented nature of the items captures the central premise of validation, which is that institutional agents can engage in student-centered behaviors that enhance a sense of validation among students. The six items relating to how much students perceive that instructors actively reach out, engage them within the classroom, and recognize students’ progress parsimoniously assess academic validation in the classroom. Similarly, general interpersonal validation can be measured by a six-item set related to their perceptions of how faculty and staff have reached out to them and expressed interest in their development. Furthermore, perceptions of general interpersonal validation and academic validation in the classroom are highly interrelated. Students who report high levels of validation in the classroom are also likely to report high levels of general interpersonal validation.

Overall, the cross-validation tests show that the DLE survey items represent two validation constructs that are part of a higher order factor model across both groups. However, notable differences exist between the groups. For example, for students of color, the item related to feeling empowered by faculty to learn is directly related to the academic validation they report in the classroom as well as their general interpersonal sense of validation. Although the interrelatedness of this item and both factors are theoretically grounded, this relationship for White students is not observed. In addition, differences in mean scores indicate that students of color report lower levels of validation than White students, with a more stark difference in academic validation in the classroom. These results suggest that students of color and White students experience validation differently at their institutions, which is consistent with previous research on classroom experiences for underrepresented students. For example, Cabrera and Nora (1994) found that African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans were more likely than White students to feel isolated from class discussion and singled out in class. These negative classroom experiences significantly affected the alienation that students generally felt at their institutions. Furthermore, prejudiced faculty and staff indirectly influenced the alienation students felt, given the strong correlation of these individuals with negative classroom experiences in their study. Thus, classroom experiences strongly influence underrepresented students’ general perceptions of the institution. The strong relationship between validating classroom experiences and students feeling generally empowered by faculty at the institution therefore makes sense for students of color. Invariance tests also showed differences across groups in how items measuring whether students feel like their contributions were valued in class (academic validation) and whether or not staff recognize their achievements (general interpersonal validation) contribute to validation. Those differences speak to the level of inclusiveness that students report and how this contributes to their own sense of feeling valued in the college environment.

Implications

The DLE instrument was designed to assess the campus climate for diversity, educational practices, and student learning outcomes, as national surveys currently lack this multifaceted approach (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). The DLE targets students in their second and third years of college and community college students who have earned a modest amount of credits at a single institution, although it can be used to assess undergraduates at all levels and institutional types. Primary outcomes featured in the DLE include habits of mind and skills for life-long learning, competencies for multicultural living, and achievement and student mobility measures (Hurtado, Cuellar, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, & Arellano, 2009). Additional outcomes can be measured by linking the DLE to other survey and institutional data on retention. Advancing student success will require more information about the college environment and how students experience it; these measures of validation capture faculty and staff efforts to be student-centered and inclusive. Validation is an action-oriented process that involves interactions between students and institutional agents. Through quantitative analyses of validation, institutional researchers may be able to more quickly assess student experiences to anticipate the likelihood of reenrollment and other college outcomes. Data can be presented to faculty, staff, and counselors to reflect on student experiences on campus and increase awareness about creating more inclusive practices in diverse environments. However, it is also recommend that institutions spend time identifying the key institutional agents that assist in student success to understand their practices and interactions with students. Identifying exemplars and key practices that result in increasing students’ validation in the environment may be a key element in improving overall retention rates. The use of validation measures shifts the focus from student behaviors such as engagement (or lack of engagement) to how students experience the learning environment and to improvements that can be made in how educators shape student experiences. Understanding the validating experiences of diverse student populations can provide valuable knowledge for the development of learning environments that empower all students to succeed and achieve their educational goals.

Reference

Graduating Student Exit Survey:
Rates of Student Satisfaction from 2009-2011

Annually, Howard University administers a graduating student exit survey to prospective candidates for graduation who are enrolled in all undergraduate programs. The primary purpose of this survey is to obtain information about students’ satisfaction with a range of academic and co-academic experiences during their matriculation. The results presented comparatively show the rate of satisfaction from 2009 to 2011 in three specific areas: access to mentoring, freshman/sophomore year academic advisors and junior/senior year academic advising.

Access to Mentoring:
This graph represents students’ rate of satisfaction from 2009 to 2011 with access to mentoring. Overall satisfaction (satisfied and very satisfied) with access to mentoring saw an increase from 53% in 2009 to 56% in 2011. Improvement is also seen in the decrease of “very dissatisfied” responses from a steady 10% in both 2009 and 2010 to 4% in 2011.

Freshman/Sophomore Year Academic Advisors:
This graph represents students’ rate of satisfaction from 2009 to 2011 with their academic advisors in their freshman/sophomore year. In 2009 and 2010, 57% of students demonstrated being either satisfied or very satisfied with their advisors; that rating then rose in 2011 to 60%. Overall there were relatively consistent responses from 2009 to 2011, showing slight changes from year to year.

Junior/Senior Year Academic Advisors:
This graph represents students’ rate of satisfaction from 2009 to 2011 with their academic advisors in their junior/senior year. In 2009, 75% of students reported having been satisfied or very satisfied with their advisor, which then fluctuated to 69% in 2010 and then to 72% in 2011. The overall dissatisfaction of with academic advisors increased by 7% in 2009 to 2010, while the “very satisfied” respondents dropped from 26% to 19%, respectively.
Becoming STEM Protégés: Factors Predicting the Access and Development of Meaningful Faculty-Student Relationships
By: Kevin Eagan, Felisha A. Herrera, Juan C. Garibay, Sylvia Hurtado, Mitchell Chang (2011)

Introduction

Many studies examine student-faculty interactions without providing explicit connections to mentoring activities between faculty and students. With funding from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, this study sought out to address this gap in the literature by examining the predictive power of student characteristics, pre-college activities and achievement behaviors, institutional climate measures, and structural characteristics in determining the frequency with which students report receiving mentorship from faculty during college. The conceptual framework applied in this study is as follows: faculty interaction is an essential component in the undergraduate experience that can impact student outcomes and promote matriculation into STEM graduate programs and into STEM research careers.

Methodology

Data was collected from a national sample of 2,311 undergraduate students who started and persisted in STEM majors to understand how they access these critical relationships with faculty during college. This study draws from frameworks of mentorship (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Mullen, 2005; Nora & Crisp, 2007; Ragins, 1999) and academic socialization processes (Becher, 1989; Stanton-Salazar, 2010) to examine the structures of opportunity within institutions and the characteristics and behaviors of students that facilitate or discourage STEM students' development of supportive mentoring relationships with faculty.

The Importance of Mentorship

Mentors as institutional agents

- Faculty members have an important role and responsibility in helping to socialize students in college. Faculty should serve as resource agents in providing personal and institutional resources that facilitate students' success. They may also work as knowledge agents and advisors through academic counseling and by informally transmitting knowledge about the educational system. As networking coaches, faculty help students learn to network and provide opportunities for developing and modeling appropriate networking skills as well.

Academic socialization through mentorship

- The role of faculty, as the primary agents of socialization, may have the greatest influence on how students experience the collective culture of science. By entering into a mentoring relationship with faculty, students may increase the rate at which they become socialized within science and become more accustomed to the norms of the culture of science. Likewise, this increased rate of socialization may provide access to a wider array of professional networks and opportunities, which may further advance success (Hunter et al., 2010).

Results

- After controlling for students' demographics and pre-college experiences, Asian American students report receiving significantly less frequent mentorship from faculty compared to their White classmates; however, there were no significant differences between White students and their Black, Latino, or Native American counterparts.

- Students with higher SAT scores tend to report significantly more mentorship from faculty during college, which would lend support to the rising-star hypothesis (Ragins, 1999), as faculty recognize the potential in high-achieving students and identify them as potential protégés.

- Students who failed at least one course in college reported significantly less frequent faculty mentoring activities. Failing a class may signal to potential faculty mentors that students lack a certain degree of potential and may discourage faculty from wanting to mentor a student.

- The findings also suggest that students who attended an HBCU received significantly more faculty mentorship compared to their peers at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Research has concluded that HBCUs offer students more supportive environments, as students report receiving significantly more encouragement from faculty to succeed academically (Allen, 1992; Nelson Laird et al., 2007).

- Attending an institution where students, on average, felt that faculty at their institution were interested in students' personal problems significantly predicted more frequent mentorship from faculty. Likewise, students at colleges and universities where faculty, on average, reported spending more hours per week advising and counseling students tended to receive significantly more frequent mentorship.

Implications

- Being mentored by faculty members not only helps students become socialized into their undergraduate institution (Weidman, 1989) and academic discipline (Becher, 1989) but it also helps students to access important networks of information (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010) that can help them progress along career and educational pathways (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Landefeld, 2009; Seymour et al., 2004).

- By connecting with students in a way that helps them to become socialized into their undergraduate STEM majors, faculty mentors can provide the guidance and support necessary for students to successfully navigate their educational and career trajectories.

REFERENCES: