Improving Policy, Access, and Accountability Through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives in Higher Education

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Developed for ADS805
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Researcher Background

- BA in English Literature and Anthropology from St. John Fisher College

- MA in English Literature from Buffalo State College

- Currently a PhD student at Niagara University

- 7 years of experience working in higher education in Western New York, primarily at Villa Maria College
  - Mainly working with diverse, minority, and non-traditional student body
  - Interested in access, equity, and policy improvement for at-promise students, particularly in WNY colleges

Access

Policy

Accountability

Access is only the first step toward education equality.

The Purpose of the Research

➡ Higher education should be accessible and equitable for all students who wish to pursue it, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, or any other demographic factor

➡ Policy should incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and those creating policies should be held accountable for their development and implementation

➡ Individuals from minority backgrounds or of differing socioeconomic status often miss out on opportunities even when accepted into college proving that access itself is not the only issue that should be researched

General Research Questions

➡ What barriers prevent students from persisting through their college degrees once accepted?

➡ What diversity, equity, and inclusion policies are being developed to assist students who are accepted into a higher education institution?

➡ What is the leadership at higher education institutions doing to support and encourage more accessible and equitable education for all students?

➡ How do large, public institutions compare to smaller, private institutions in terms of DEI and access policies?

Mixed-Methods Research Questions

What higher education policies are in place to improve graduation and persistence rates for minority and at-promise students?

What percentage of students experience barriers that prevent them from graduating?

What is the demographic background of students who complete their college degrees compared to those who do not?

Literature Review

▶ There is no single policy or procedure alone that can create ideal higher education leadership, access to education, or diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies. However, higher education organizations are quickly becoming "opportunity engines for a growing number of Americans" and so there needs to be an effort to move forward (Ballysingh, 2017, p. 6).

▶ One of the most valuable things that can be done is to take note of what policies help students succeed and what policies undermine student access.

▶ It is not enough for diverse students to simply have access to higher education because "increasing equity in terms of numbers participating is not sufficient if the education experience of students does not enable success" (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 152).

Ballysingh, T. A. Answering the call: Hispanic-serving institutions as leaders in the quest for access, excellence, and equity in American higher education. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal, 11*(3).

Wilson-Strydom, M. (2015). University access and theories of social justice: Contributions of the capabilities approach. *Higher Education*, 69(1), 143-155.
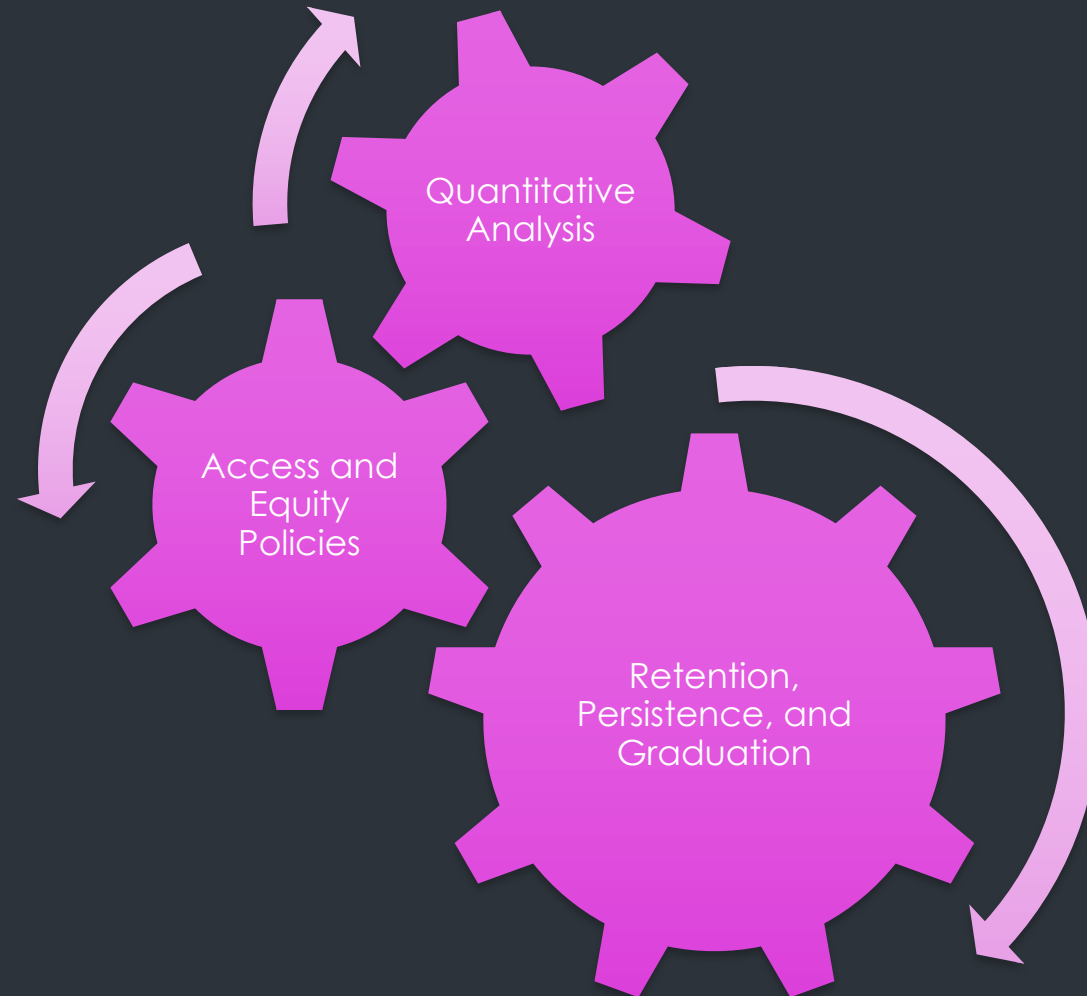
Literature Review

- Higher education is an avenue that should be available and accessible for all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, and the various articles and authors showcase that equity and accessibility are vital components of educational organizations. Crow and Dabars (2020) summarize the importance of access, success, and support when they write:

  - Equity and excellence are complementary because talent is distributed throughout the socioeconomic spectrum; national competitiveness in educational attainment depends on extending opportunities to sufficient numbers from all demographic strata; diversity enhances the quality of the educational experience; and the success of the nation's democracy depends on an educated citizenry. (p. 72)

- Jack (2019) summarizes best what needs to be done moving forward: "Diversity must be continuously cultivated. The elite college must change, adapt, and grow right along with its changing student body" (p. 182).

Crow, M. M., & Dabars, W. B. (2020). The emergence of the fifth wave in American higher education: America's future depends on embracing the idea that excellence and access in higher education are not incompatible, but synergistic. *Issues in Science and Technology*, 36(3), 71-74. https://link.gale.com/apps

Jack, A. A. (2019). *The privileged poor*. Harvard Univ. Press.

Gaps in the Literature

Quantitative Analysis

Access and Equity Policies

Retention, Persistence, and Graduation

Specific Quantitative Analysis
connecting
Access and Persistence

Methodology and Data Collection

- Mixed-methods approach
  - Quantitative data collection related to student persistence and graduation: acceptance and graduation statistics, surveys
  - Qualitative data collection related to access policies and student experiences: policies, open ended surveys, interviews
- Due to time, area, and access constraints, data collection would need to be limited to local WNY area colleges, with the easiest institution to gather information from being Villa Maria College. With further support and funding, I would want to expand to other local institutions to gather responses from colleges and universities with a variety of populations.

Data Analysis

- Quantitative: acceptance and graduation statistics (from websites) and student surveys (about college DEI, access, and barrier opinions and actions)
  - Acceptance and graduation results/numbers
  - SPSS analysis for survey data
- Qualitative: college policies, open ended surveys following up on quantitative, and interviews
  - Compare acceptance and graduation results to college policies – do the numbers line up with what the college promotes?
  - Include open ended questions on student survey and potentially follow up with interviews

Research Implications

- Potential Results:
  - Identify barriers for student persistence and success
  - Create policies that improve student access and support based on feedback from students
  - Examine what policies work and where there is room for improvement

- Limitations:
  - Research will focus mainly on Villa Maria College, a diverse private liberal arts college in WNY
  - What works for one college might not be universally applicable to all colleges

Contributions to Existing Knowledge and Areas for Growth

- The goal of this research is to provide both empirical and anecdotal support for implementing DEI and increased access policies in higher education to improve persistence and success, particularly for diverse and minority students.

- A mixed-methods approach at one local institution will provide a starting point for broader policy changes.

- Additional research can be done to answer questions such as the following:

  - What can leaders in higher education institutions do to encourage institution and policy changes?

  - How do larger, public institutions differ from smaller, private institutions with respect to DEI and access initiatives?

  - How can the research done in WNY be applied to institutions outside of the area to increase access, persistence, and success?

References

- Ballysingh, T. A. Answering the call: Hispanic-serving institutions as leaders in the quest for access, excellence, and equity in American higher education. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal, 11*(3).

- Crow, M. M., & Dabars, W. B. (2020). The emergence of the fifth wave in American higher education: America's future depends on embracing the idea that excellence and access in higher education are not incompatible, but synergistic. *Issues in Science and Technology, 36*(3), 71-74. https://link.gale.com/apps

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