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Exploring Student Engagement Experiences: A Look at Students in the Educational Opportunity Program at a Community College

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Exploring Student Engagement Experiences: A Look at Students in the
Educational Opportunity Program at a Community College

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Abstract

This study focuses specifically on a state-funded specialized program, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), at a local community college in New York State. The purpose of this study is to explore the student engagement experiences of full-time students enrolled in the EOP. The objective of this research is to help the administration, staff, and faculty at this institution better understand the engagement experiences of students in EOP in order to implement helpful interventions through counseling, advising, and programming. Thirty-five students in the EOP consented to participate in the study by completing an online questionnaire in regards to their personal, social, academic, and career-development engagement behaviors. Findings suggest that students are more engaged in immediate academic and essential resources and less engaged in various social, career, and professional development opportunities. The researcher recommended several possible strategies for intervention to increase the students' likelihood of academic, professional, and personal success.

Keywords: student engagement, educational opportunity program, community college, student development, higher education

Exploring Student Experiences in the Educational Opportunity Program at a Community College

Introduction

Student engagement is inexplicably intertwined with an individual's ability to learn, adapt, integrate, commit, and ultimately, take advantage of their educational experience. It is discussed within academic literature in terms of student success, motivation, leadership, collaboration, involvement, growth, and development. In relation to higher education, the concept of student engagement is gaining prominence in response to its connection to persistence and degree completion (Dunne & Owen, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

It is all the more relevant for first-year, students from underrepresented groups, and/or students who are less academically prepared for college (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). Although there are clear benefits of engaging, these students are likely to be less involved due to conflicting cultural influences. These students are more likely than their peers to have familial obligations, financial responsibilities, and difficulty balancing their educational and home life (Strayhorn, 2007).

Although there are many advantages to a community college education, previous literature suggests that these institutions have significantly greater chances of students not completing a post-secondary degree than those who attend four-year colleges/universities (Schuetz, 2008). Consequently, students from underrepresented groups, who are in their first year, attending a community college, and/or who may be less academically prepared are likely to be at an increased risk of not persisting to graduation (Astin, 1984).

In order to best integrate and engage this population of students, specialized programs have been put in place to increase the likelihood of student success. These programs have been designed at the federal, state, college-level. In addition, summer orientation programs, college

orientation or college success courses, and first-year experience programs are all common institutional interventions to ensure the success of all new students (Federal TRIO Program, 2016; EOP, 2016; Bers & Younger, 2014).

This study focuses specifically on a state-funded specialized program, the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), at a local community college. The purpose of this study is to explore the student engagement experiences of full-time students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program. The objective of this research is to help the administration, staff, and faculty at this institution better understand the engagement experiences of students in EOP in order to implement helpful interventions through counseling, advising, and programming. The following review of the literature examines the background of EOP, theories related to student engagement, and various factors associated with students' likelihood of academic success and degree completion. These various factors are viewed under a student development lens and attempts to illustrate engagement holistically by looking at academic, career-development, social, and personal factors.

Definition of Technical Terms

There are multiple terms that should be defined to understand for the purposes of this paper. Student engagement can be defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to an educational experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 518). This definition is commonly used in regards to research regarding student engagement within a behavioral context. The term student involvement has been used interchangeably with student engagement in multiple research studies to describe this concept as well. Student development is a term that is used pervasively by student affairs professionals within higher education settings. The widespread definition used to capture the concept of student development is “the ways that a

student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 6). This definition encompasses all areas of student development including academic, career, and personal/social development (Evans, et al., 2010).

Overview of Educational Opportunity Programs

The State University of New York’s Educational Opportunity Program is comprehensive in nature and seeks to improve educational success for students who “show promise in succeeding in college but may not have otherwise been offered admission” (SUNY EOP, 2016). The Educational Opportunity Program is a specialized program, which “combines access, academic support, and supplemental financial assistance to make higher education possible for students who have the potential to succeed, despite poor preparation and limited financial resources” (SUNY Program History, 2016). The purpose of this program is to grant the opportunity of a higher education learning experience, as well as, increase enrollment, transfer, and graduation rates of students of historically economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Traditionally, these students may not have otherwise had the opportunity to attend an institution of higher education and those who did, were less likely to persist to graduation (SUNY EOP, 2016).

The Educational Opportunity Program was conceptualized as a foundation of the 1964 Master Plan of the State University. The theme of equal opportunity for every student progressed into the development of an appropriation bill and creation of the Educational Opportunity Program, led by Arthur O. Eve. Arthur O. Eve modified the model Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge program (SEEK) to establish the EOP within State Universities and Higher Educational Opportunity Program (HEOP) within independent colleges. Educational

Opportunity Programs have expanded and are currently available in 43 colleges/universities within the State Universities of New York. All EOP and HEOP programs are uniquely designed to meet the needs of their student population (SUNY Program History, 2016; SUNY EOP, 2016).

The Educational Opportunity Program at Community College

The eligibility guidelines for admission to an Educational Opportunity Program are consistent across New York State. First, students must be a New York State resident for 12 months prior to enrollment. Second, students must require special admissions consideration. Third, students must qualify as economically disadvantaged according to the New York State income guidelines. Priority is given to matriculated, full-time, day students who come from a historically disadvantaged background. All applicants are required to provide documentation of specific income guidelines determined by the household size and total annual income. For example, a student would be eligible to apply if he/she is a member of a household size of four and the total annual income does not exceed \$44,955. The admissions criteria for EOP programs may be more precise depending on the population of students at the college or university. For example, there are a few additional requirements for students who are applying to EOP at a specific community college. In addition to the state requirements mentioned above, students are only eligible to apply if they are a first-time, full-time student, and a resident of New York State for at least one year. Applicants are also required to be a high school graduate with a C average or have a General Equivalency Diploma (SUNY EOP, 2016).

All students enrolled in the EOP program at this community college will receive four meetings per semester with their designated college counselor to discuss academic, career, financial, and personal counseling. In addition, the following services are offered for all accepted

EOP students: a four-week summer orientation program, a study skills and college orientation course, one-on-one tutoring, financial advisement and assistance in state and federal forms, and assistance to transfer to similar opportunity programs within New York State. These services, programs, and resources offered by EOP are designed to ease the transition into college life and ultimately, increase the likelihood of student success at this community college (SUNY EOP, 2016). The hope is for students to learn how to become independent learners, take advantage of college resources, advocate for their education, integrate into the social culture, and establish goals for their future (Strayhorn, 2007; Kuh, et al., 2006).

Engagement of Students in the EOP

Risk Factors. The U.S. Department of Education identifies seven risk factors which may increase students' likelihood of dropping out of college: delaying post-secondary enrollment, being academically underprepared, attending college part-time, being a single parent, being financially independent, caring for children at home, working more than 30 hours a week, and being a first-generation college student (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Due to the admissions eligibility guidelines of EOP programs, these students are more than likely than their counterparts to be included in one or more of these categories. It is common for students enrolled in the EOP to be academically unprepared, first-generation, low-income, and/or identify as Black, African American, Latino, Hispanic, or Multiracial (SUNY EOP, 2016; Merritt, 2008). Additionally, these students are more likely than their peers to work more than 20 hours per week, live off campus, be less involved in clubs and activities, require financial assistance to attend college, and/or attend college part-time (Merritt, 2008).

Cultural Adjustment. Additionally, these students have described “tensions between existing ethnic or cultural identities and emerging professional identities” that may be unique to

their particular life story (Olson, 2014, p. 203). Students enrolled in EOP may have to balance two worlds: their collegiate life and their home life. Depending on the individual student's background, as well as, their high school experience, the transition and adjustment to a postsecondary education may be challenging. This barrier is often overcome by connecting students to organizations, peers, and faculty with whom they share common interests and values (Woosley & Shepler, n.d.). Involvement in various types of extracurricular activities has shown to help students make smooth transitions into college as well as increase their levels of critical thinking, self-confidence, and goal-setting strategies (Merritt, 2008). Although there are clear benefits of engaging on campus, this population tends to have lower engagement than their peers due to the conflicting cultural influences (Woosley & Shepler, n.d.).

Theories and Models of Student Engagement

Astin's Student Involvement Theory. The most significant and widely researched theory regarding student engagement is Astin's Developmental Theory of Student Involvement. The framework for student involvement according to this theory is in direct relation to the amount of physical and psychological energy that students devote to an educational experience (Astin, 1984). Astin suggests that "it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement (Astin, 1984, p. 519). Therefore, the concept of student engagement is commonly researched through a behavioral lens in order to understand how students are actively participating and what they are devoting their time and energy to during the educational process. In summary, the greater the student's investment in their college experience, the greater the likelihood of personal and professional development, as well as, persistence to completing a post-secondary degree (Astin, 1984).

Under this lens, engagement can be viewed as an exploratory process to find what forms of involvement are best for an individual student. Astin provides various factors that illustrate engagement such as, academic involvement, interaction with faculty and staff, athletic involvement place of residence, and involvement with student government. Additionally, this theory shifts the perspective to focus more on the students' individually and less on educators and college administrators (Astin, 1984). This concept links back to a common goal of student success, which is to promote students to become independent learners, advocates of their educational experience, and develop personally and professionally (Kuh, et al., 2006).

Tinto's Model of Student Retention.

As student success is dependent upon degree completion, Vincent Tinto's model of student retention (1993) is widely regarded in the literature on student engagement. Tinto's model identifies three common areas of student departure: academic difficulties, the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto's model states in order to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. This model also identifies the importance of students' ability to be knowledgeable of and access resources on campus. This holistic model of student success provides much of the foundation for research, development, and institutional programming in regards to student engagement (Tinto, 1993).

Factors Associated with Student Engagement

Keeping in mind the theories and models outlined previously, there is considerable research evaluating all areas of student engagement: academic, social, personal, and

career/professional development. There are several central themes throughout the body of literature on student engagement to date which are widely accepted and undisputed. Academic-related engagement factors can be described as active learning, applying course material to other areas, discussing concepts outside of class, utilizing technology, contact between faculty and student, and conducting research (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Social engagement factors are regarded as connecting with other students, socializing on campus, attending campus events/activities, joining clubs/organizations, holding a formal leadership role on campus, and studying with peers (Kuh, et al., 2006). Additionally, the student-faculty relationship is also very significant as mentorships and/or simply discussing academic and professional goals can help students identify with and build rapport (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Career and professional development factors can be described as attending career counseling, enrolling in a career-exploratory course, receiving help/feedback with resume writing, discussing career goals with professionals on campus, participating in an internship or related experience, and engaging in community-based project or service learning program (Tinto, 1993). Although these factors culminate to provide a holistic model for researchers to explore this topic within higher education, it does not take into account the particular challenges of students within the Educational Opportunity Program. The Effort-Outcome Gap attempts to provide additional information on the specialized population of EOP (Greene, et al., 2008).

Effort-Outcome Gap. As previously mentioned, students with characteristics from the previously mentioned “at risk” categories have significantly lower success rates than their counterparts. However, recent research studies have discovered that engagement may be especially meaningful and critical for minority and academically underprepared first-year college students (Greene, et al., 2008). Several research findings have highlighted the presence of an

“Effort-Outcome Gap”, which is the result of having to put forth more effort in attempting to compensate for a pervasive combination of academic and institutional barriers to educational success” (Greene, et al., 2008, p. 529). Similarly, research from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement discovered that the “at risk” students seem to benefit more from engagement than other students. The survey found that if students persisted to the middle of the spring semester of their first year, they were more likely to be engaged than their peers (McClenney, 2007). Although the benefits are clear, it is important to understand what behaviors associated with engagement are the most promising for this population. As previously discussed, students affiliated with the EOP may fall into this “gap” as their educational and economic circumstances have limited their opportunities for success.

This literature identifies the clear benefits of best practice engagement strategies within higher education for all students and why it is especially important for students involved in the EOP. The purpose of this research study is to explore the engagement experiences of students in the EOP at one community college in order to better understand the needs of the students and increase their likelihood of personal and professional success.

Method

Setting

The setting of this study was a mid-size public two-year institution in New York State, United States of America. As of fall 2016, there were 13,587 students enrolled at either a full-time or part-time status. For comparison, 232 of these students were enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program at the time of the study. The student at this community college at this time consisted of 54% female, 47% male and 36% under 20 years old, 33% 20-24 years old, 12% 25-29 years old, and 20% over the age of 30. As of fall 2015, the students identified their race-

ethnicities as 62% White, 20% Black, 9% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 4% two or more races, and 1% nonresident alien. Lastly, as a frame of reference for student life, this community college had more than 50 clubs and organizations, 11 intercollegiate team sports, and over 700 students living on-campus in the residence halls.

Participants

All full-time students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program at the local community college during the spring semester of 2017 were invited to participate in the research study. As of spring 2017, there were 232 students enrolled in the EOP. All participants were selected to participate specifically because of their affiliation with the EOP. Students under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate in the research study and were directed to exit the questionnaire if they selected the answer, “18 years old or younger.”

Of all eligible students, 37 students began the questionnaire and 2 students responded that they were 18 years old or younger. Therefore, 35 students agreed to participate and completed the questionnaire (N=35), which was a response rate of 15%. All students were over the age of 18, attending the community college full-time, and enrolled in the EOP. The age demographics of the participating students was as follows: 71.43% aged 19-20, 11.43% aged 21-22, 2.86% aged 23-24, and 14.29% aged 25 or older. The majority of respondents identified their gender as female (68.57%) and the remainder identified their gender as male (31.43%).

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the community college granted permission for the study to take place on-campus beginning February of 2017. The director of the EOP accessed the student database to collect the email addresses of all eligible students enrolled in EOP. All potential participants received an email from the director of EOP inviting them to participate in

the study and complete an online questionnaire. Students were also recruited in-person at the EOP office upon arrival for their monthly appointments. If recruited in person, the researcher was available to discuss the purpose, confidentiality, consent, and to answer any questions. There was also a flyer to advertise for the research study that was posted on the wall in the waiting area of the office, as well as, copies of this flyer in the waiting area for students to take if they desired (see Appendix B).

Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and is thoroughly explained through the recruitment email and the informed consent form. The student's decision whether or not to participate did not impact the relationship with their EOP counselor. If a student decided to participate, they were free to withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Additionally, students had the option to skip any or all questions once they began the questionnaire. To give consent to participate, students were required to select "Yes" to the first question of the questionnaire in order to view or begin the questionnaire. By selecting "Yes", they agreed to the terms of the consent form outlined and therefore, gave consent to participate in the research study. The second question of the questionnaire inquired of the student's age and any responses of "under 18 years old" were directed to exit the questionnaire. All students who completed the questionnaire were asked if they would like to enter a raffle to receive one of four five-dollar gift cards by providing their email address. If they selected "Yes" to this question, they were re-directed to a new questionnaire to ensure that their responses and email address could not be linked. The questionnaire was expected to take between seven and eleven minutes to complete.

Instrument

An online questionnaire created by the researcher was administered through Qualtrics, an online questionnaire tool hosted by The College at Brockport (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed for all responses to be anonymous. The participating students were free to skip any or all questions or exit once they began the questionnaire. The questionnaire could be accessed on a computer or a mobile device and took approximately 6-10 minutes to complete.

The researcher designed the questionnaire using both multiple choice and Likert scale questions within a matrix table to measure the responses. There were five options for any Likert scale questions, which were “Never”, “1 time”, “2-4 times”, “5 or more times”, and “Not Applicable.” Students were asked to answer questions and self-report their behavior regarding various demographics and engagement factors at this community college. These various factors are viewed under a student development lens and attempts to illustrate engagement holistically by looking at academic, career-development, social, and personal factors.

Data Analysis and Management

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed through the Qualtrics software tool. Questions five through 18 were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings will be further explored in the results section.

The results from the questionnaire were kept confidential online through the Qualtrics website under the primary researcher’s secured account. All online questionnaire responses and records were transferred and stored in the researcher’s secured personal computer. These records will be retained for three years upon completion of the research study.

Ethical Considerations

Generalization of this study is limited to New York State and Educational Opportunity Programs and/or similar programs. This study was conducted at one specific community college with academic and financial admissions criteria. This study may be replicated through a companion program; however, it is important to take into consideration the student population, location, and type of institution.

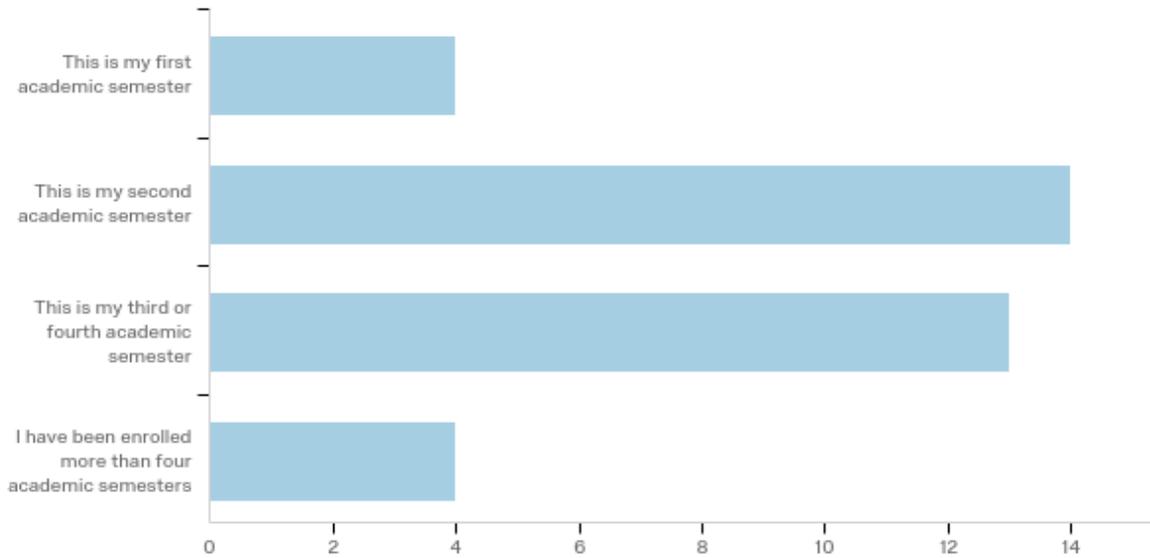
Results

Demographics

The questions pertaining to student demographics were asked in the beginning of the questionnaire such as, the number of academic semesters completed, current living accommodations, means of transportation, and number of days a week on-campus. The majority of students stated they were in their second academic semester (40%) or in their third or fourth semester (37.14%) (see Graph 1). For living accommodations, 91.18% of students responded that they live off-campus with family or guardian members. Only 2.94% of students shared that they live off-campus with roommates and 5.8% of students live on-campus in the residence hall (refer to Graph 2). The responses for means of transportation varied as most of the students take the city bus to the community college shuttle to the main campus (37.14%), however, driving a personal vehicle or getting dropped off/picked up is also common (see Graph 3). Despite the low number of students who have individual means of transportation to campus, the majority of students are on-campus five to six days a week (60%) (refer to Graph 4).

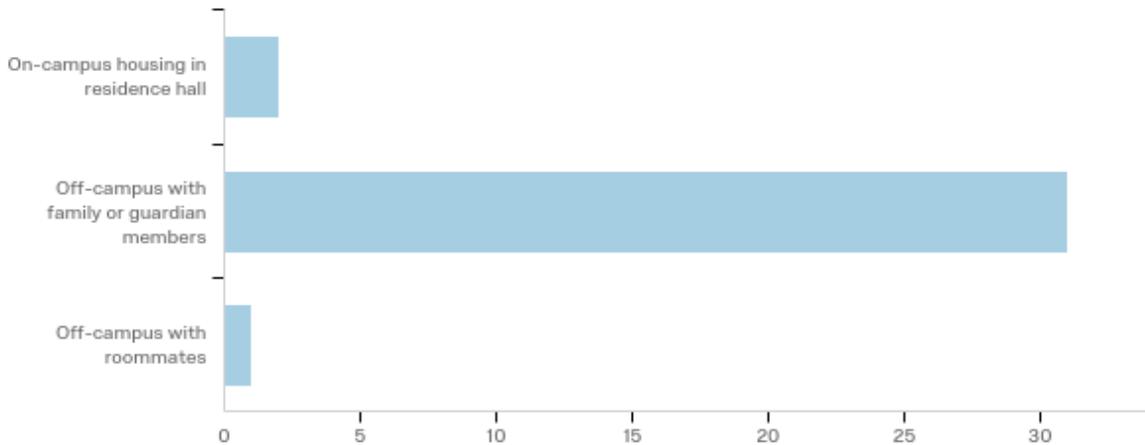
Graph 1

Q5 - How many total academic semesters have you been enrolled at this community college?



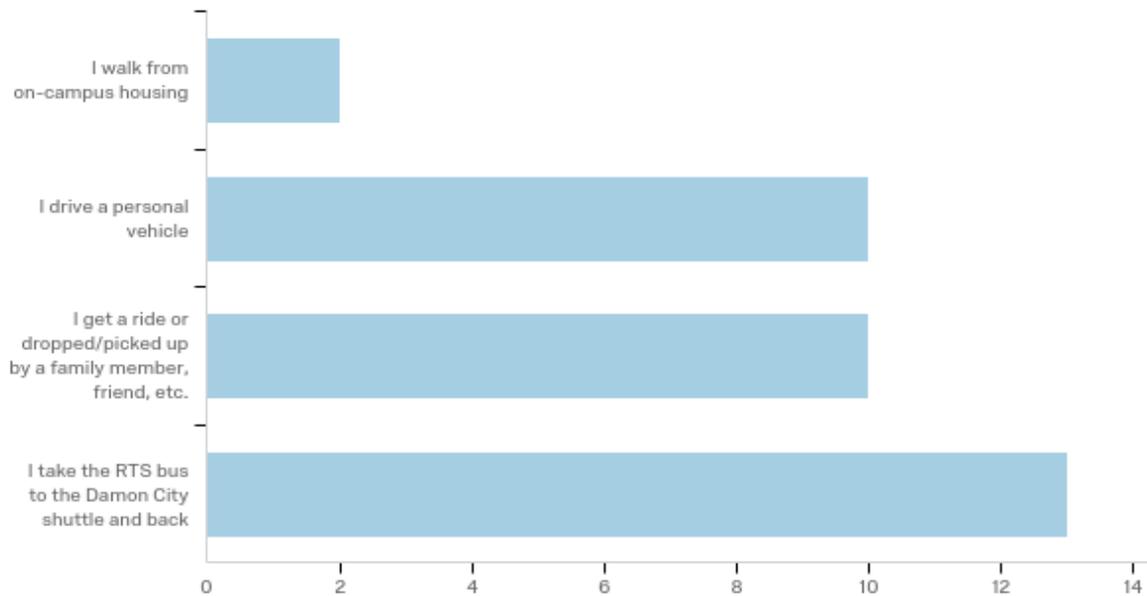
Graph 2

Q6 - Which of the following best describes where you are living while attending this community college?



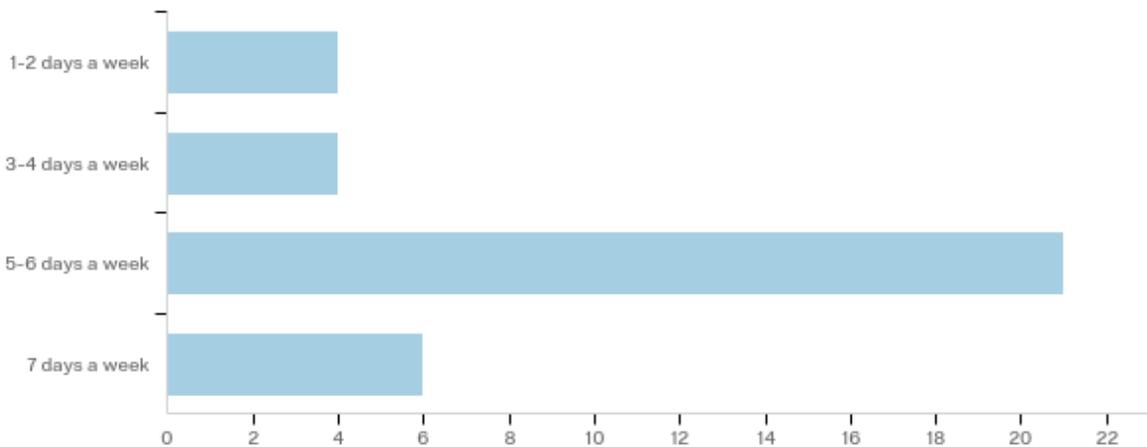
Graph 3

Q7 - How do you typically get to and from campus?



Graph 4

Q8 - How many days a week, on average, are you typically on campus?



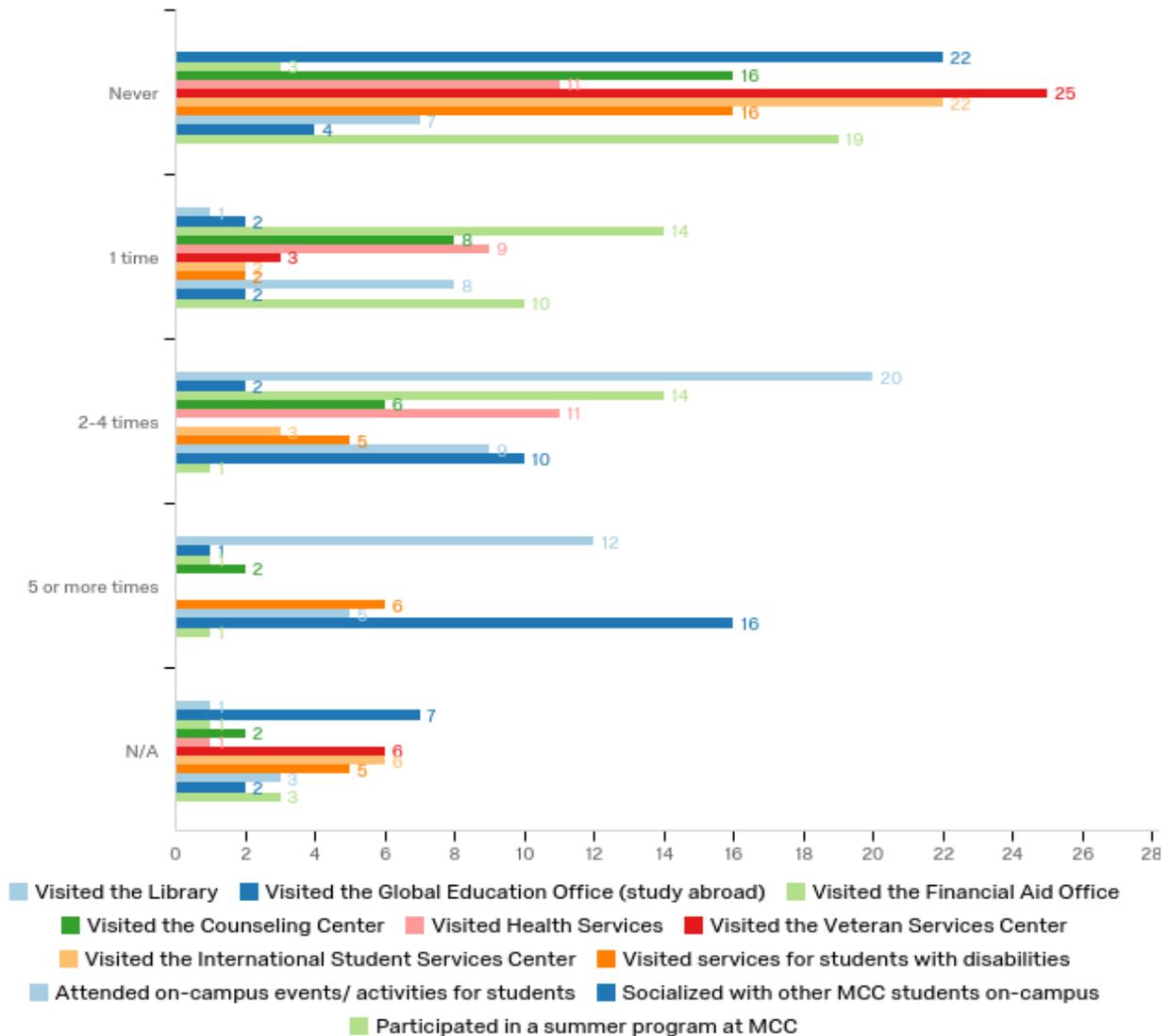
Social and Resource Engagement

In regards to the questions pertaining to social engagement factors, only 2.86% (one student) responded yes to being involved in an athletic team. However, 20% of students indicated that they were a member of a club or organization on campus. Although there are many

students who have never attended an on-campus event or activity (21.88%), it appears that the majority of students have attended at least one or more events (68.76%). Minimally, students shared that they are socializing with other students on campus; 47.06% of students responded five or more times this year and only 11.76% of students reporting not once this year. Likewise, 73.53% of students shared that on an average week, they do not attend a college-sponsored activity of any kind. Please refer to Graph 5 for more details.

Graph 5

How often have you visited the following campus offices or engaged in the following activities?

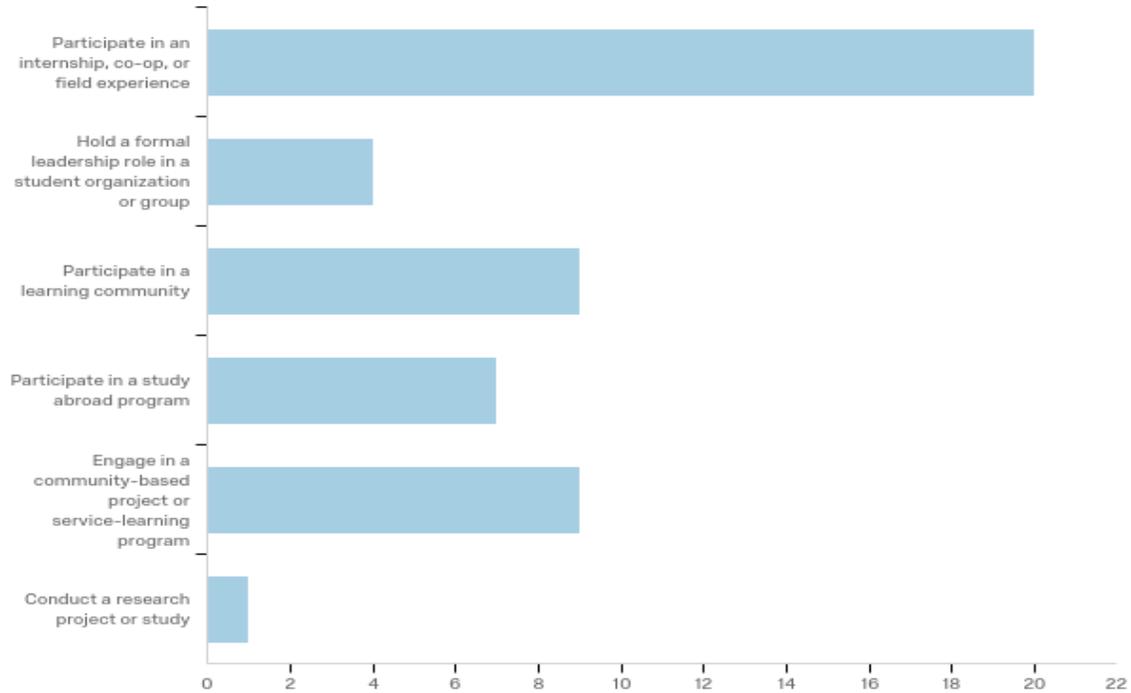


As expected, the results from Graph 5 illustrate that students most often utilize the fundamental resources on campus such as, the library and financial aid services. There were no students who reported that they have never visited the library and 97.05% of students have visited one or more times. Similarly, 87.87% of students shared that they have visited the financial aid office one or more times. Another essential office, Services for Students with Disabilities, seems to be utilized by students in EOP, as 38.24% of students have visited one or more times. Other support services office such as, the Counseling Center, Health Services, Global Education Office, International Student Services, and Veteran Services Center appear to be visited significantly less. For the Counseling Center, 70.59% of students have either never visited or only visited once. Even less students seem to be visiting Health Services with 62.31% of students reported either never visiting or only visited once. Please refer to Graph 5 for more details.

Lastly, when asked about taking advantage of various opportunities on campus, the largest percentage of students responded that they have or plan to participate in an internship, co-op, or field experience (66.67%). Thirty percent of students reported that they have or plan to engage in a community-based project, service-learning program, or learning community. Slightly less students (23.33%) shared that they have or plan to participate in a study abroad program. Very few students reported that they plan to hold a formal leadership role on campus (13.33%) or participate in research on campus (3.33%). Please see Graph 6 for more details.

Graph 6

Q14 - Which of the following have you done or plan to do before you graduate? (Select all that apply to you.)



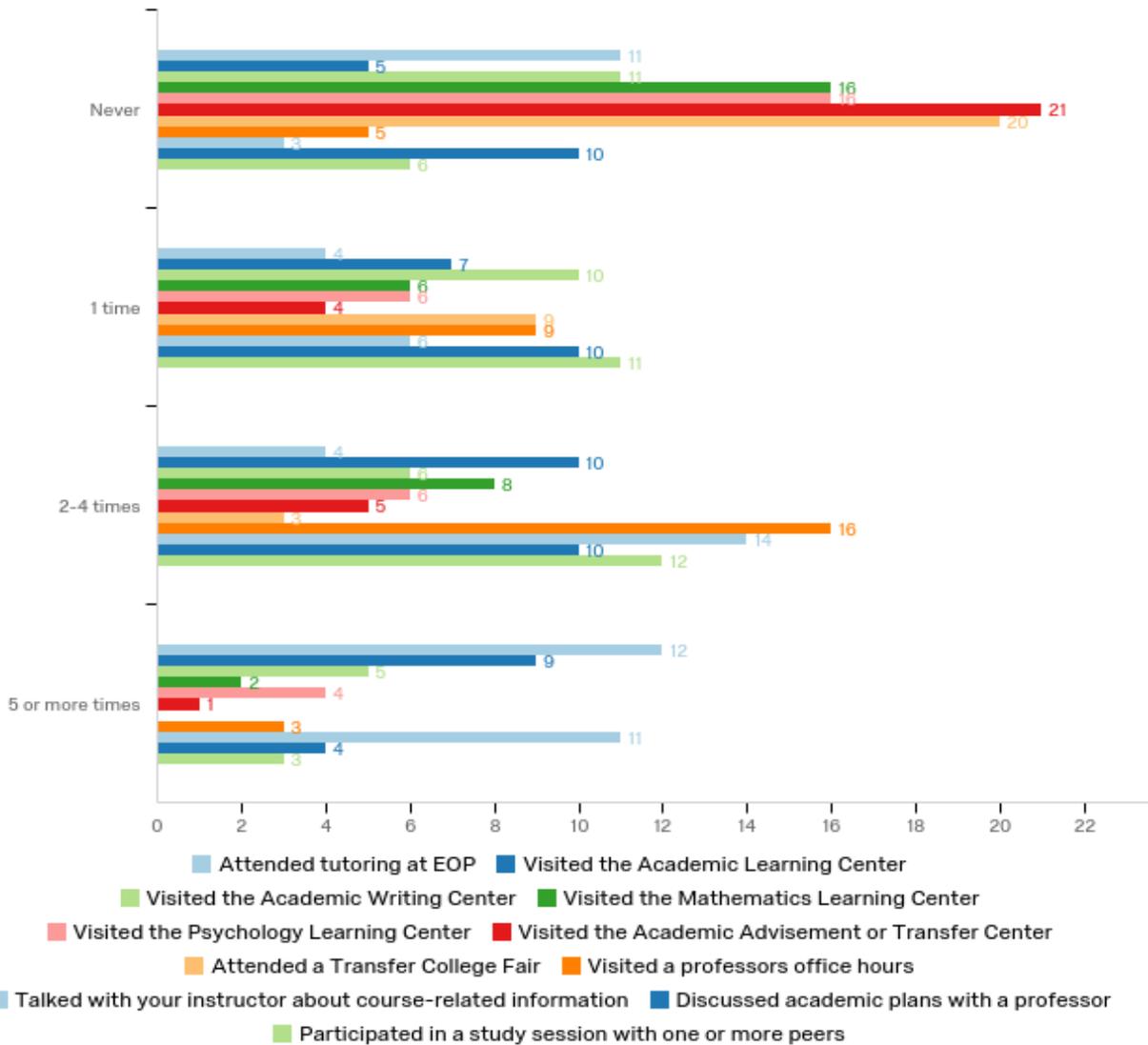
Academic Engagement

In regards to academic-related engagement factors, more than half of the students described using the Academic Learning Center on campus two or more times this academic school year (61.29%). There were however, 16.13% of students who have never visited or used this service on campus. The lack of services from these students may be due to the tutoring available in the Educational Opportunity Program, which is visited the most frequently of all academic support services. There were 35.48% of students who have never used EOP tutoring; however, 51.61% of students reported attending at least twice. Students appear to utilize the Academic Writing Center and the Academic Mathematics Learning Center less often this academic school year, as 34.38% of students described using the Writing Center two or more

times and 31.25% of students reported visiting the Mathematics Learning Center two or more times. Please refer to Graph 7 for more details.

Graph 7

How often have you visited or used the following academic services during the 2016-2017 academic school year? (Please respond to each item)

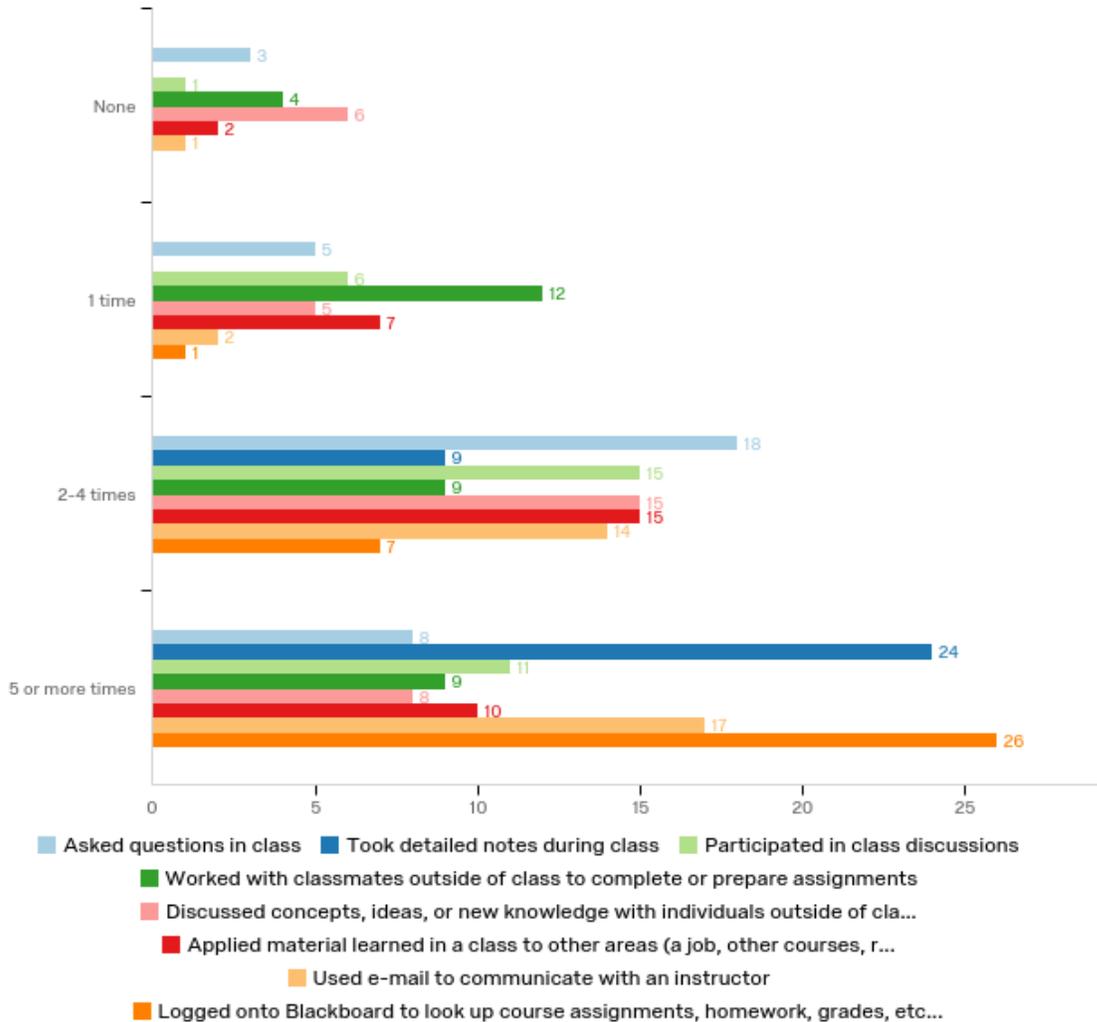


Aside from tutoring, students seem to be engaged less in other academic-related factors that may enhance their likelihood of succeeding. It appears the highest percentage of students in EOP are engaging in these behaviors between 2 and 4 times this academic year. Most frequently,

students have attended a professors office hours more than once (84.84%), discussed information related to course material with a professor (91.18%) shared educational plans with a professor more than once (41.18%), and participated in a study session with peers (81.26%). However, there are a number of students have never visited a professors office hours (15.15%), discussed information related to course material with a professor (8.82%), shared educational plans with a professor (29.41%), or participated in a study session with peers (18.75%). The majority of students describe being involved actively in the classroom by asking questions, taking detailed notes, participating in class discussions, and using e-mail and blackboard consistently to check on course material and communicate with their professors. Less students report discussing concepts, ideas, or new knowledge with individuals outside of class or applying course material to other areas. Please refer to Graph 8 for more details.

Graph 8

In your experiences at (community college) during the 2016-2017 academic year, about how often have you done each of the following?



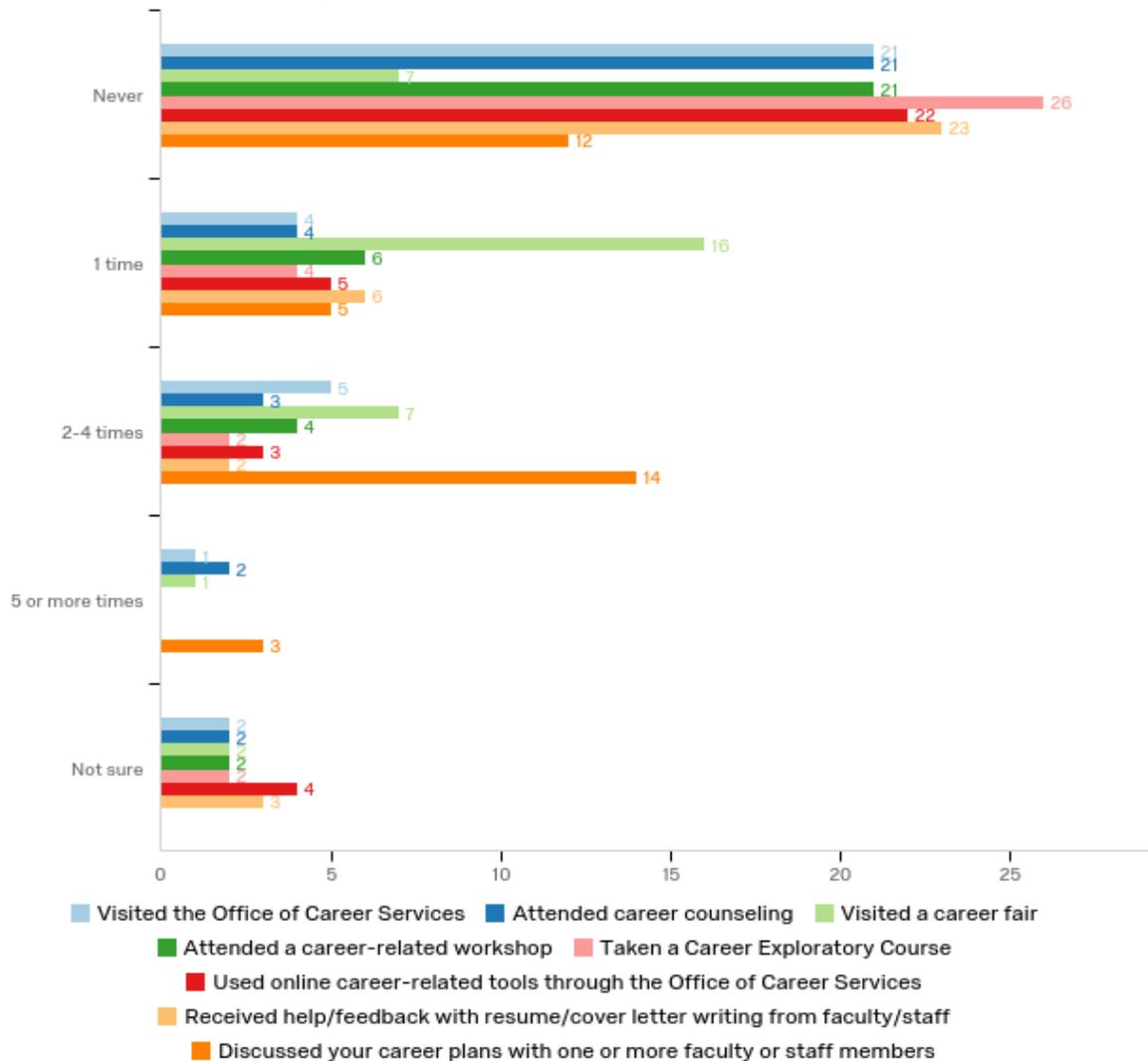
Career-Development and Professional Engagement

The responses in relation to career-development demonstrated the lowest levels of engagement behaviors. Many students in EOP have never visited the Office of Career Services (63.64%), received career counseling (65.63%), attended a career-related workshop (63.64%), taken a career exploratory course (76.47%), used online career-related tools through the Office of Career Services (64.71%), or received help or feedback with resume or cover letter writing from any faculty or staff member at the community college (76.65%). Similarly, 62.5% of

students reported that they have never attended a transfer-college fair on campus (see Graph 8). However, the responses did indicate that students in EOP are likely to attend a career fair or discuss career plans, as 72.72% of students reported they have attended at least one career fair and 64.71% of students shared that they have discussed their career plans with a faculty or staff member at the community college. The details of all career-development related behaviors can be found in Graph 9.

Graph 9

How often have you visited or used the following career-related services during the 2016-2017 academic year? (Please respond to each item)



Discussion

It is important to reflect back to the literature on student engagement in relation to the specialized population of students in the EOP. As many of these students may be categorized as “at risk”, research demonstrates that engagement is especially meaningful and that they may benefit more from these interventions than their peers (Greene, et al., 2008; McClenney, 2007). This research study exploring the engagement experiences of students in the EOP provides concrete information and feedback for faculty and staff at the community college. This increased awareness of how and in what ways students in EOP are engaging academically, socially, professionally, and personally will provide opportunities for intervention to support student success. This information and feedback is discussed below.

This research has four main findings. The first finding is that students in the EOP are most engaged in immediate-support services. It is important to keep in mind the challenges that this specialized population of students may be encountering due to their academic, economic, and cultural background. This may explain why students in the EOP at this community college are more likely to engage in behaviors overall that are of immediate importance such as, in-classroom active learning, tutoring (all centers), going to the library, attending professors’ office hours, and visiting services such as, financial aid and disability.

The second finding is that students are less engaged in engagement strategies that are geared towards long-term student development. For example, students in this program are not likely to take advantage of the services and resources on campus in relation to advisement, transfer services, counseling, and career-development. Considering the outside lifestyle factors that these students are likely experiencing, it is not surprising that they may not reach out for additional help. However, at the community college level, a significant amount of time and effort

is devoted to academic planning and transfer services to ensure that students are aligning their educational and career goals.

The third finding expands upon this, as it is clear that students in EOP are not focused on career-development or exploration. A minimal number of students took advantage of these opportunities such as, career counseling, career workshops, career exploratory courses, online career tools, and resume and cover letter writing. As many students at this community college are departing before receiving a degree, it is all the more important for students to be engaging in these experiences that may help them obtain a job. Similarly, as students in the EOP are likely to be at an economic disadvantage, it is likely that they will be seeking employment part-time or full-time while they are enrolled at the community college.

The last finding is in regards to the low engagement in social factors such as, attending on-campus events/activities, joining clubs/organizations, holding formal leadership roles, socializing on campus, participating in athletics, and connecting with faculty and staff. To expand upon this, students were not likely to discuss academic or career goals with a faculty member. To reiterate, this may be due to the time constraints that these students may be facing; however, this area of student engagement is critical for students to feel connected to the college.

Looking at these outcomes from a student development or holistic lens, the students in the EOP at this community are engaging academically; however, they are significantly less engaged in social and career or professional development experiences. In relation to Tinto's model outlined previously, students in this EOP are integrating into formal academic systems but they are disengaged in informal academic systems (faculty/staff interactions), formal social systems (extracurricular activities), and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. For students in EOP, it is important to consider what is meaningful for a particular student and what

they hope to take away from their college experience. A theme that has unfolded is the divide between what is imperative to their success and what may supplement their educational experience. As students in the EOP may have more external demands than a traditional college student, it is their choice to determine if and how they will take advantage of these services and opportunities. It is important for faculty and staff in higher education settings to be mindful of these circumstances while encouraging students to explore new experiences in order to grow and develop.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study that should be addressed. First, this study only gathered data from 35 students, which is approximately 15% of the population. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to all students in the program at the community college or to other Educational Opportunity Programs. Second, this study did not yield comparisons for students who are not part of the EOP. Therefore, it is uncertain whether these results reflect attending a community college, participating in EOP, or a combination of both. Third, the researcher assessed using a self-created questionnaire which compromises the validity of the instrument. Although there were other instruments to assess these objectives at a community college, the researcher did not have access to any comparable instruments due to confidentiality, restrictions, and/or lack of funding. Fourth, the researcher was also a counselor in the EOP and consequently, students who had a relationship with this staff member may have been more inclined to agree to participate in the research study. In future research, it would be best for an outside staff member of the college/university to recruit and administer any research studies.

Implications for Future Research

The hope from this research is that the counselors, staff, and administrators of the Educational Opportunity Program at this community college will be more informed of the behaviors of students in the program in order to establish positive interventions. Continuing research in the areas of student engagement and development are essential for the continuation and progression of the EOP and related programs. Comparative studies of Educational Opportunity Programs across New York State, as well as, longitudinal studies will be helpful in determining what interventions have proven to be the most successful for students. It may also be beneficial to cross-examine practices at the associates, bachelors, state, and private institutions of higher education to help administrators understand how to most effectively design these types of programs.

Implications for College Counselors

As a college counseling professional, defining and measuring student success is ever-changing as the needs of student's adapt. As counselors, it is important to meet the students where they are in terms of their student development. It is also imperative that counselors, staff, and administrators accommodate to the needs of the student body by establishing institutional policies and programs. The Educational Opportunity Program and similar programs have the opportunity to create effective and meaningful programming.

Based upon the results from this research study, counselors and administrators of the EOP at this community college may find it beneficial to intervene in several ways. First, developing more specialized group programming within EOP seems essential to connect students to resources they may not otherwise use. For example, it may be helpful to design a career-development program or workshop in which students can explore jobs & careers, discuss career plans, and receive help with resume & cover letter writing, and/or a tutorial for online career

tools. Second, the career exploration course appears to be underutilized and therefore, recommending students who may be undecided on an academic program or career path to enroll. Third, establishing an EOP club and creating events exclusively for students in the program may be beneficial to help increase social engagement. An alternative recommendation for this may be to require documentation of one “engagement” experience such as a campus-related event or program each semester as part of the program agreement. Lastly, a faculty mentorship program may help build a culture of positive student-faculty relationships. This mentorship program would provide students an outlet to discuss academic and future career plans with a faculty member who is connected to their field of interest. This may also help increase opportunities for shadowing, internships, field work, and co-op experiences.

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Appendix A
Online Questionnaire

Exploring Student Engagement Experiences: A Look at Students in the Educational Opportunity Program

Q1 Student Consent to Participate in Research and Waiver of FERPA Rights

Study Title: Exploring Student Engagement Experiences: A Look at Students in the Educational Opportunity Program at a Community college

Researcher: Ms. Erin Coffey

This is a consent form for participation in a research study. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you may leave the study at any time. Your decision will not affect your grades or status at the College.

As a result of your student status, your records and personal information are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Since the data to be obtained may include student record information you will be asked to sign a limited waiver of your FERPA rights for the purpose of this study only.

Please review the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and may receive a copy upon request.

Purpose of the study:

I invite you to participate in a research project that will look at full-time students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program and their level of involvement and engagement at (the community college). Established from previous research findings, this research study will focus on the areas of integration in college life, connecting to the campus and community, and classroom engagement. The objective of this research study is to help staff, faculty, and administrators at (the community college) better understand how and to what extent students enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program are engaging in the college experience. This information will be valuable in helping to prepare students, improve their college experience, and increase their likelihood of success.

Duration of the study:

This research study will begin upon Institutional Review Board Approval and will be completed within one year. Participation expectations: You will be expected to complete a ten-minute online questionnaire through Qualtrics. Questions will be asked regarding classroom engagement, integration in college life, and connect to the campus and community. It is the intent that this questionnaire will provide the opportunity to reflect on your perceptions,

decisions, and development as a student and learn more about ways you could be engaged and/or involved at (the community college).

Confidentiality provisions and Data disposition:

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not impact your relationship with your EOP Counselor. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You are free to skip any or all questions once the questionnaire begins. All students who complete the survey may choose to be entered into a drawing to receive one of four (\$5) dollar gift cards to the college Bookstore by providing their email address. If you select "Yes", you will be re-directed to a new page to ensure that your questionnaire responses and email address cannot be linked. The data will be collected through an online questionnaire using the Qualtrics survey tool. The questionnaire is designed for all responses to be anonymous and the researcher will then use a number system to identify each response. Participating students are free to skip any or all questions once they begin the questionnaire. The information collected from the questionnaire will not identify or link an individual student to their responses. The results of this study will be kept confidential through the Qualtrics website under the researcher's account. The researcher and a faculty supervisor will have access to the Qualtrics account. All online questionnaire responses and records from Qualtrics will be transferred and stored in the researcher's secured personal computer upon graduation (June 2017). These records will be retained for three years upon completion of the research study.

Who can answer questions about the study:

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Erin Coffey, Counselor Intern, Educational Opportunity Program at (the community college) (*email and phone number*). The Director of the Educational Opportunity Program may also be contacted (*email and phone number*).

FERPA RELEASE

In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), I hereby authorize Ms. Erin Coffey, the primary research investigator, to gather personal data that may include information in my educational records: I understand further that (1) I have the right not to consent to the release of my education records; (2) I have the right to receive a copy of such records upon request; (3) and that this consent shall remain in effect unless revoked by me. I may revoke this right at any time, but that any such revocation shall not affect information previously accessed by the research investigator prior to the receipt of any such written revocation.

I have read this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights by agreeing to this form and I may receive a copy of this form upon request. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to select "Yes" to the following question.

Q2 By selecting, "Yes", you are agreeing to the terms above and consent to participate in this research study by filling out this questionnaire. By selecting, "No", you are not agreeing to the terms above and decline to participate in this research study. If selected, you will be directed to exit the questionnaire.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q3 What is your age?

- Under 18 years old (1)
- 19-20 (2)
- 21-22 (3)
- 23-24 (4)
- 25 or older (5)

If Under 18 years old Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q4 What is your gender identity?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer to self-describe (please specify): (3) _____
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q5 How many total academic semesters have you been enrolled at this community college?

- This is my first academic semester (1)
- This is my second academic semester (2)
- This is my third or fourth academic semester (3)
- I have been enrolled more than four academic semesters (4)

Q6 Which of the following best describes where you are living while attending community college?

- On-campus housing in residence hall (1)
- Off-campus with family or guardian members (2)
- Off-campus with roommates (3)
- None of the above (4)

Q7 How do you typically get to and from community college's campus?

- I walk from on-campus housing (1)
- I drive a personal vehicle (2)
- I get a ride or dropped/picked up by a family member, friend, etc. (3)
- I take the RTS bus to the Damon City shuttle and back (4)
- None of the above (5)

Q8 How many days a week, on average, are you typically at the community college's campus during the 2016-2017 academic year?

- 1-2 days a week (1)
- 3-4 days a week (2)
- 5-6 days a week (3)
- 7 days a week (4)

Q9 Are you a student athlete on a team sponsored by community college's athletic department?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Are you a student athlete on a team sponsored by community college's athletic department? Yes Is Selected

Q10 If so, what athletic team are you a part of?

- Men's Basketball (1)
- Men's Baseball (2)
- Men's Lacrosse (3)
- Men's Soccer (4)
- Men's Swimming & Diving (5)
- Women's Basketball (6)
- Women's Lacrosse (7)
- Women's Softball (8)
- Women's Soccer (9)
- Women's Swimming & Diving (10)
- Women's Volleyball (11)

Q11 Are you a member of any clubs or organizations at this community college?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Are you a member of any clubs or organizations at this community college? Yes Is Selected

Q12 Which clubs or organizations are you a part of?

- Africa United (1)
- American Sign Language Club (ASL) (2)
- ANIME Club (3)
- Auto Club (4)
- B.A.S.I.C. [Brothers and Sisters In the name of Christ] (5)
- Biology Club (6)
- Black Students Union (7)
- Cabbages & Kings (8)
- Campus Activities Board (CAB) (9)
- Campus Ambassadors (10)
- Celtic Society (11)
- Chemistry Club (12)
- Chinese Culture Club (13)
- Cinema Society (14)
- Comic Creator Club (15)
- Dungeons and Dragons (16)
- Electronic Gaming Society (17)
- Engineering Leadership Council (18)
- Geoscience Association (19)
- Global Union International Students' Association (20)
- Gospel Choir (21)
- Got Your Six Club (22)
- Grupo De' Capoeira (23)
- Health Information Technology Club (24)
- Health, Physical Education & Wellness Club (25)
- Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Project (26)
- Honors Council (27)
- Hospitality Club (28)
- Indigenous Peoples of Americas (29)
- Martial Arts Club (30)
- Math Club (31)
- Monroe Doctrine Newspaper (32)
- Muslim Club (33)
- Outdoors Activities Unlimited (34)
- Philosophy Club (35)
- Phi-Theta-Kappa (36)
- Pool & Billiards (37)
- Psychology Club (38)

- Pride Alliance (39)
- Radiology Club (40)
- S.A.D.H.A. [Student American Dental Hygienists' Association] (41)
- Sci-Fi Fantasy Club (42)
- Spanish Club (43)
- Student Art Organization (44)
- Student Government Association (SGA) (45)
- Student Music Association (46)
- Student Nurses Association (47)
- T.H.E. Club (48)
- Travel & Tourism (49)
- Veterans Club (50)
- The Community College Radio (51)

| | Never (1) | 1 time (2) | 2-4 times (3) | 5 or more times (4) | N/A (5) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Visited the Library (1) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Global Education Office (study abroad) (2) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Financial Aid Office (3) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Counseling Center (4) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited Health Services (5) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Veteran Services Center (6) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the International Student Services Center (7) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited services for students with disabilities (8) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Attended on-campus events/ activities for students (9) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Socialized with other community college students on-campus (10) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participated in a summer program at community college (11) | <input type="radio"/> |

Q16 How often have you visited or used the following academic services during the 2016-2017 academic school year? (Please respond to each item)

| | Never (1) | 1 time (2) | 2-4 times (3) | 5 or more times (4) | N/A (5) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Attended tutoring at EOP (1) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Academic Learning Center (2) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Academic Writing Center (3) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Mathematics Learning Center (4) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Psychology Learning Center (5) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited the Academic Advisement or Transfer Center (6) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Attended a Transfer College Fair (7) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited a professors office hours (8) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Talked with your instructor about information related to a course you were taking (grades, make-up work, assignments, etc.) (9) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Discussed your academic program, course selection, or transfer plans with one or more professors (10) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participated in a study session with one or more peers (11) | <input type="radio"/> |

Q17 How often have you visited or used the following career-related services during the 2016-2017 academic year? (Please respond to each item)

| | Never (1) | 1 time (2) | 2-4 times (3) | 5 or more times (4) | Not sure (5) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Visited the Office of Career Services (1) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Attended career counseling (2) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Visited a career fair (3) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Attended a career-related workshop (4) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Taken a Career Exploratory Course (5) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Used online career-related tools through the Office of Career Services (6) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Received help/feedback with resume or cover letter writing from a faculty or staff member(7) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Discussed your career plans with one or more faculty or staff members (8) | <input type="radio"/> |

Q18 In your experiences at this community college during the 2016-2017 academic year, about how often have you done each of the following?

| | None (1) | 1 time (2) | 2-4 times (3) | 5 or more times (4) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Asked questions in class (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Took detailed notes during class (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participated in class discussions (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Worked with classmates outside of class to complete or prepare assignments (4) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Discussed concepts, ideas, or new knowledge with individuals outside of class (6) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Applied material learned in | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a class to other areas (a job, other courses, relationships, etc.) (8) | | | | |
| Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Logged onto Blackboard to look up course assignments, homework, grades, etc. (9) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q19 Would you like to enter in a drawing to receive one of four (\$5) gift cards? If you select yes, you'll be prompted to enter your email address.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Appendix B

Flyer to advertise for research

EOP STUDENTS- WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please consider taking a few minutes to fill out an online questionnaire regarding your experiences at ___ while you're waiting. The questionnaire has also been sent to your student email or you may access it here:

https://brockport.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eyz2OtwlZnWlii9

**Enter a chance to win one of four (\$5)
gift cards to the bookstore!**

