

Project Profile

Mapping Effective Mentorship for Rural Community College Students

Building Evidence to Increase Rural Learner Success



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Organization

University of Washington | Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) | Seattle, WA

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Geographic Focus

National

Population Focus

This project focuses on practitioners and learners who are involved with mentorship programs among rural-serving institutions (RSIs).

Project Overview

A gap exists in knowledge regarding rural-serving community colleges generally and mentorship strategies among these institutions particularly, and this gap curbs the development and implementation of mentorship programs to support rural learners. Through this project, the Community College Research Initiatives (CCRI) at the University of Washington will address this gap through a multi-site, three-stage study of mentorship programs at public rural community colleges across the U.S. The project will benefit scholars and practitioners by producing a database of mentoring strategies at rural community colleges, advancing understanding of the way to implement evidence-based solutions for mentoring, and gauging the student experience within mentoring programs with particular focus on learners from low-income backgrounds and racially minoritized students.

Mentorship is an important part of student support, particularly for marginalized students. But mentorship needs to be meaningful and accessible for rural learners to provide the support necessary for their success.

– University of Washington, CCRI

Research Questions

1. What types of mentoring programs are currently in place at public rural-serving community colleges? What learner populations are included or targeted by these programs?
2. How do student support practitioners and learners at RSIs experience these mentorship opportunities?
3. How do learners feel the mentorship experience at their colleges affects their academic and career outcomes?
4. How do public RSI practitioners successfully engage and implement evidence-based best practices for mentorship to support learners from low-income backgrounds?

Research Methodology

CCRI will use mixed methods to understand mentorship more clearly in rural two-year colleges by leveraging a multi-site study drawing on data collected from institutional websites, interviews, and student surveys. This project will leverage publicly available data via web scraping to create a database of current mentorship opportunities at two-year rural-serving institutions. Second, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with practitioners who are involved with mentorship programs at their institutions will serve as another data source. Finally, the project will evaluate survey data and focus groups from learners' experience with such programs. Taken together, these data will be synthesized and closely reviewed through coding rubrics that are responsive to emergent findings.

From the data, the project will create a model of rural-serving mentorship programs as they currently exist to identify similarities and differences between data-derived models of mentorship and research-based best practices of mentorship models.

Research Significance

Student support practitioners and educational researchers interested in innovative models of mentorship will find this action-oriented research project useful. Practitioners are best equipped with evidence-based mentorship models that are relevant to the needs of rural community colleges. Researchers will also be armed with empirical knowledge of the way mentorship models are implemented within the context of rural institutions.

Practitioners will have an opportunity to situate their work in the broader context of other rural-serving institutions through use of a publicly available database of mentorship programs. They will participate in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to receive an analysis of mentorship opportunities at their respective colleges, including insight into learners' experience. Finally, more informed models of mentorship will be developed using interview and survey data from this project.

Grant Period of Performance

March 2023 to February 2026