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Faculty Views of "Nontraditional" Students: Aligning Perspectives for Student Success

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Faculty serve as a primary point of contact for students in college, playing vital roles in students' retention and attainment. The perceptions and beliefs held by these institutional actors are important for understanding the context that shapes students' experiences while they are in college, and potentially, long after they leave. The purpose of this work is to examine faculty members' perceptions of nontraditional student experiences. Findings highlight faculty members' awareness of students' multiple roles and obligations; perceptions of student academic success, including barriers to succeeding; and the ways faculty connect with students and the types of connections they forge. The findings from this work highlight the need to consider more research on how the experiences of students who do not fit a "traditional" model are interpreted by those in positions of power at higher education institutions. As such, we add to calls for more work that considers these institutional actors explicitly and how they shape student success.

Faculty Views of "Nontraditional" Students: Aligning Perspectives for Student Success

The idea of the "traditional" college student (financially dependent on parents, enrolling full-time directly after high school, attending without interruption through to graduation, with no dependents or significant off-campus work obligations) is no longer the norm in the U.S. The concept does not correspond with the experience of most students. Increasingly, large proportions of students in U.S. colleges and universities work for pay, commute to campus, attend multiple institutions, and enroll in college after age 24 (Choy, 2002; Davis, 2012; Soares, 2013). While Census data indicate increases in short-term degrees among nontraditional students (Kazis, et al., 2007), retention and degree attainment rates of these students lag behind their "traditional" counterparts, particularly for associate and baccalaureate degrees (Choy, 2002; Horn & Carrol, 1996; Shapiro, et al., 2012; Shapiro, Dundar, Ziskin, Yuan, & Harrell, 2013). While efforts to understand what matters in the success of these students have been particularly emphasized in recent years in response to President Obama's completion challenge (e.g., Flint, 2005; Hoffman & Reindl, 2011; Kazis, et al., 2007; Pusser, et al., 2007), these rates demonstrate that more needs to be done to better understand and address the needs of nontraditional students and to support their success.

In considering this need, our attention turns to the fact that most "nontraditional" students spend the majority of their on-campus time attending classes, consequently relying on faculty as their primary point of contact with the institution. The value of this kind of interaction between faculty and students has been examined only in a cursory way (Stage & Hubbard, 2007). Without further research on faculty as culturally-situated actors in these pivotal interactions, higher education researchers risk implicitly and uncritically taking the position of the institution, or reifying students' and families' positions as deficient or problematic. Thus, this work is in effort

to contribute to broader conversations regarding what matters in the success of "nontraditional"

students. The purpose of this paper is to examine faculty members' perceptions of

"nontraditional" students on commuter campuses, considering explicitly communication between

faculty and students (Martínez Alemán, 2007), and how faculty develop student support practices

(Bensimon, 2007).

Part of a broader study focused on working students, this manuscript presents an analysis

of interviews and focus groups with faculty at three nonresidential institutions located in the

same Midwestern metropolitan region. Specifically, this exploration centers on two research

questions:

- What are faculty members' perceptions of "nontraditional" students and their

    experiences?

- What role do faculty view themselves and their institutions playing in the academic

    success of "nontraditional" students?

Theoretical Perspectives

Faculty are the most consistent point of contact between institutions and students (Stage

& Hubbard, 2007). This is particularly true for students who have been referred to in the

literature as "nontraditional"; students who share common characteristics such as: being older

than 24 years old, working for pay while in school, attending higher education part-time,

commuting to campus, having dependents, and/or being financially independent (Choy, 2002).

While research has focused on the role faculty play in student learning (e.g., Anaya & Cole,

2001; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Rendon, 1994; Umbach & Wawrzynski,

2005), their role in student success has received much less attention. Further, like much of higher

education research, little of this work has considered the impact of faculty on experiences and

success of nontraditional students. Relative to dependent-status students who enroll in college soon after graduating high school, nontraditional students have been found to have higher attrition rates and lower graduation rates, related to greater commitments outside of school that at times pose difficulties to academic success; greater financial hardship and unmet financial need; and higher levels of stress related to their academics (Baum, 2010; Kasworm, 2010; Pusser, et al, 2007).

Given these differing experiences and gaps in understanding, the role of faculty for nontraditional students is worthy of more consideration. For our study, we draw not only from understandings of faculty as principal actors in student learning, but seek to more deeply understand how faculty think of nontraditional students and the ways in which this thinking informs their practice. In this regard, we directly draw from Bensimon's (2007) framing of faculty *funds of knowledge*, and seek to respond to her and others' (Martinez Aleman, 2005; Stage & Hubbard, 2007) calls for more work that examines these understandings.

While previous research provides a framework for examining faculty experiences in particular, the broader theoretical perspective of our study considers both individual and institutional roles within the higher education system. In this effort, we draw in part on a social reproduction perspective (Bourdieu, 1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This framing assumes the potential role of the higher education system and the actors within it in perpetuating as well as transforming structures of inequality. This view is supplemented by organizational perspectives that consider the institutionalization that occurs within colleges and universities that promotes "sometimes surreptitious" (Perrow, 1986, p.159) values and the interests of those in power (Jepperson, 1991; Perrow, 1986; Stinchcombe, 1968), blinding actors from the potentially oppressive consequences of rationalized decisions (Morgan,

1997; Scott, 1992). Combining these perspectives helps us to understand and describe how dynamics within the higher education system shape what institutional actors (e.g., faculty) can perceive as possibilities, and the norms and values that shape their actions. To approach the study of faculty members' perceptions of nontraditional students and academic success in this way, thus, is also to deepen understanding of praxis within institutions.

Study Context

The work of the faculty in our study is situated within institutions that are interconnected within a tri-county region that has experienced dramatic changes in industry in recent decades, exacerbation of residential segregation by race, and widening of gaps in median income. The institutions involved in this study play a major role in the education of the region's residents, serving large proportions of nontraditional students, students of color, and students from low-income backgrounds (Hossler, Gross, Pellicciotti, Fischer, & Excell, 2007). Previous work on student enrollments across the region has found that a great number of students enroll in multiple institutions concurrently and throughout college as a part of their academic trajectory (Author). This context situates the work of these faculty within a complex dynamic of students' lives within and outside of school.

Research Methods

This study is based on focus groups and interviews with 33 faculty members at three participating institutions. Participants were recruited via campus partners, and included faculty from a full range of departments and units, targeting those who worked extensively with undergraduate students early in college studies. Just over half of the faculty participants taught at the participating multi-campus community college, while the rest taught at one of the two regional universities that serve similar students or as transfer destinations for those who begin at

the community college. Given the mobility of students across the region's higher education institutions, these faculty collectively play active roles in the education of nontraditional college students. See Table 1 for a summary of relevant contextual information on participants.

Table 1 About Here

We adopted a semi-structured approach in these focus group discussions and interviews. Topics covered centered on how faculty perceived students' experiences and daily realities, as well as on how they understood their own roles in supporting student academic success. Data analysis began with low-inference coding and, through a collaborative process among research team members, gradually built toward more focused, theory-defined coding and categorization of experiences (Carspecken, 1996). Our early analyses of focus group transcriptions revolved mainly around an iterative process with multiple rounds of open coding followed by research team discussions generating an initial list of low-inference codes applied in subsequent rounds of thematic coding. A qualitative data analysis software package, *Atlas.ti,* was used to store and organize data and analyses. These processes and the resulting analytical documents provided material for peer debriefing sessions with outside and collaborating researchers in which we probed the inferences folded into our emerging analyses.

Findings

Three important themes emerged from our analysis of discussions with faculty at the three institutions in our study: 1) awareness of the complexity of students' lives; 2) perceptions of student academic success; and 3) faculty connections with students. Each of these themes is discussed and illustrated in further detail below.

Awareness of Complexity of Students' Lives

The faculty members who participated in this study conveyed a common, implicit understanding that working while enrolled in school was a given aspect of students' lives. During almost all of the interviews and focus groups, participants expressed awareness of the multiple demands that working students balance in their multiple roles—roles they described as defining characteristics of these students. Further, participants described strategies that students—academically successful students in particular—employed to balance these multiple demands.

Distinct characteristics of "nontraditional" students. Participants acknowledged that for many students, being a student was not their primary role. A university faculty member, for example, noted, "[Going to school is] not their life; it's a part of their life. And quite frankly, in many cases, they have other parts of their lives which are more important, or more pressing." This comment, and other similar examples, reflected faculty participants' awareness of the obligations and complexities faced by many students at their institutions. At the same time, these comments highlight a perception that students fail to account adequately for the time that course work will require.

Whereas most comments suggested a widely-held understanding of students' multiple roles, some emphasized the balancing act required to manage these roles, pointing to this as an essential skill required for students' academic success. For example, a university faculty member shared this observation about a student with whom she had interacted:

A guy, about mid-30s, who was a straight-A student here, and an impressive student really, very well prepared, and I just happened to realize he's got a wife and two kids, his wife works full-time too, and I asked him how did he do this, how's he doing so well in

school, and he laid it out to me like it was a business plan. He said during the week, I

don't study, I just come to class two nights a week and the other time I'm with my family

[…] Sunday morning, he would come to the library and it's the one time of the week he

would study…and he says he's always done before the library closed.

This comment reflects not only an awareness of the multiple demands on students' time, but also

recognition and praise for this student's efforts to manage his time and fulfill his obligations as

father and husband as well as student.

Another university faculty member shared similar sentiments when talking more

generally about students and about her perceptions of students' time-management strategies:

"[The students] that do well are able to segment their life. And where the segment of time is

allocated to doing that work is appropriate to the amount of time that needs, those are the

successful ones." Participants referred to this segmentation in students' lives not only in their

descriptions of students who had roles as parents and spouses, but also in their comments about

working, dependent students. These findings not only indicate these faculty recognize that

students have multiple roles and that they compartmentalize these roles, but also suggest that

these faculty believe students *should* compartmentalize their multiple roles to promote their

academic success.

Dichotomy of student types. The faculty accounts revealed a prominently shared

perception of a dichotomy in the experiences (or even "types") of students on their campuses—

traditional-age students comprising one distinct group and nontraditional students comprising the

other. One university faculty member, for example, described the differences between these two

types of students as "night and day," discussing the greater difficulty he saw facing

nontraditional students and more "relaxed" disposition of younger students. In emphasizing this

distinction, he related that he found younger students to "have more ability to juggle their time and more control over juggling their time. […] they're a lot more relaxed and […] they have a lot more focus even within that juggling act." He further added, "it's very clear which students are in which situation and the stresses upon them."

In contrast to accounts regarding younger students, faculty participants often described nontraditional students' enhanced responsibilities, but described these students as being motivated by family obligations and economic necessity. Comments regarding nontraditional students in particular also frequently included references to their low academic self-confidence. These comparisons translated into distinctions in describing how students' multiple roles affect their college experiences in varying life situations.

Similarly, experience gained prior to postsecondary enrollment—shaping his or her role as student—was also perceived to be a distinctive implication of a student's age. As captured by a regional university faculty member in referring to these students on his campus, "You can pick them out. After the first week, you know who they are because they kind of come in with a different mentality." This quote illustrates a view, shared by several other participants, that nontraditional students on campus drew on their life experience to become more focused and successful in their studies. This further highlights the implicit dichotomy suggested by many participants between, traditional-age students (even including those with jobs and dependents) and students over 24 studying at these institutions.

Perceived Barriers and Strategies for Academic Success

Participants' comments focused on what they perceived to be barriers to and strategies for students' academic success. Among the most prominent threads throughout the faculty focus

groups highlighted the tensions that complicate nontraditional students' efforts at academic success in college.

Multifaceted work experiences. Working was perceived as a reality for the students on these campuses. Nevertheless, participants perceived the complex dimensions of working and the varying implications it had on students' academic success. Faculty members' implicit definitions of student employment encompassed various aspects of working: the type of work; the work's relevance to the student's field of study and career goals; the location of the workplace (i.e., its location on or proximity to campus); the number of hours spent at work during a typical week; and the reasons for employment, whether as a primary source of income or as a supplement to household incomes.

The relevance of work to students' academic programs was a factor some participants perceived to have a great effect on students' success, and some participants even encouraged work if it was in students' chosen field of study. A community college faculty member in culinary arts, for example, described the benefits of working in the food industry for culinary arts students:

> It is helpful for them. We try to always encourage them to work…it's pretty obvious and pretty quick how fast their skills improve because they're working in the industry as opposed to going home and cooking, not taking their knife sets home, or whatever. But their skills improve immensely by having a part-time job.

This perspective was shared by faculty members across various disciplines, particularly in reference to adult—or post-traditional (Soares, 2013)—students who attended college as a means of professional development.

Academic under-preparation. In these interviews, faculty voiced a perception that many students lacked sufficient academic preparation, both in terms of knowledge about content, and of knowledge about navigating the institutional environment. Participants cited high enrollment in remedial courses as an indicator of poor college readiness, for example. Additionally, faculty participants also emphasized structural barriers to educational opportunity. The comment of a community college faculty member, for example, illustrated a more situated view of academic preparation:

> The students definitely want to complete their studies, but it's not always possible…
> because many of them, they can't; that's the reality. I don't know what happened… in the
> country. ... In the last probably 20 years, … math was … not very efficiently taught. I
> would say that there's… a problem there, because the students are absolutely afraid of
> math.

Here, in a pattern that was reflected across several other interviews as well, the faculty member referred both to local schools and to patterns he perceived in the U.S. more generally. Some participants even made explicit references to the role of local secondary schools in preparing students for college-level learning. Even when the students had been out of secondary school for years, many participants still noted or suggested indirectly that it is the responsibility of K–12 schools to prepare students for performance in school subjects, study skills, seeking student services, and navigating the university environment.

Some of these comments about student preparedness also seemed to convey deficit understandings of students. A university faculty member shared these sentiments, for example: "What is prevalent over here is lack of interest. It is like people want to have the degree, but they don't understand what it takes to get there." While the content of the statement focuses on an

observation about students' knowledge of the college context, the tone is unmistakably distancing, even pejorative.

Moreover, some offered the view that first-generation-student status could often constitute a barrier to academic success. In reference to first-generation students, perceived by participants to be the majority on these campuses, one university faculty member shared his view:

[First-generation students] are really blind quite honestly, walking into this thing blind…You can see that they're not prepared coming in, so they get lost and they get frustrated, and they leave…So that's the population that we deal with, coming into [this university]—needy, first-generation students.

The prevalence of the theme of under-preparation showed that while interpretations varied, it was perceived to be a highly salient problem for faculty participants as they described their understanding of students' college experiences.

Connecting with Students

Several faculty spoke of connecting with students through interacting with them on an individual basis and building interpersonal contexts for future interaction. In fact, a number described this as a vital aspect of their experiences with students. These participants perceived that effective connections with students depended on a number of factors, discussed in turn below.

Individual interaction. One-on-one interactions with students were described as key to building interpersonal contexts for future interaction, with time spent in these interactions characterized as an investment in developing relationships with students. One university faculty member illustrated this perspective, saying, "I try to build as much as I can in the relationships

with students that will permit them to come to me and talk to me." These personal interactions were also described by some as a key part of their practice and students' success, as in this participant's remark:

> It's like from an academic advisor or a professor, it's all about caring. And sometimes the only connection that they have to somebody that cares is from us. And, if we're encouraging and inspiring them, we can motivate them to stay with us sometimes… It's just caring and taking that extra step…It is wrong to stereotype any students... It's all about experiences, what they've been exposed to up to this time, were they foster care kids, a whole new project out here now in trying to get them into … postsecondary education.

This statement seems implicitly focused on traditional-age students, in pointing out the relevance of foster-care experiences, for example. Furthermore, this statement seems to reflect the perspective of a social/academic integration model, which in this case highlights the positive role of the institution and the negative aspects of students' precollege experiences. In this and other examples, participants indicated that developing relationships with students allowed them to garner information about students' expectations, family, and work obligations—information that would be difficult for students to convey in the routine short-term or depersonalized interactions of college experience.

Adapting approaches to working with and supporting students. To cultivate such interactions with their students, various faculty described ways they adapted their individual practices and policies to meet student needs. Faculty commonly expressed the importance to their practice of flexible adaptability in connecting with and supporting students, as noted by a community college faculty member:

I'm a lot more flexible because I want to keep them happy… It's not our job to keep them

happy but it's our job to help them succeed, and it's our job to help educate them because

I feel really personally responsible if I send them out into the community and [they're not

prepared to perform their job].

This statement also suggests that these participants perceive a connection between their students'

satisfaction, their students' success in the classroom and after graduation, and the participants'

own self-perception within that role.

Relating to students. Faculty often used socially distancing language when talking about

students and their experiences. One university faculty member, for example, recounted an in-

class exchange with a student:

[In a previous class] I [had] said, "I would be glad to stay with you as long as you need

to, to understand it." …   And she just shook her head, and I said, "Your response to me

was well you have children at home and you have other things to do." I said, "That was

your choice, not mine." I said, "I was willing to stay with you to help you. If you have

other more important commitments, my question to you is why are you here? Because

you're wasting your money and time." And she just looked at me.

This speaker's story emphasized hard distinctions between his responsibilities and those of the

student and, furthermore, characterized the student's unavailability after class as entirely

discretionary. This example is somewhat an exception in its extremely oppositional tone.

Nevertheless, a number of faculty participants used distancing language more subtly in

describing students. A community college faculty member remarked, for example, "The majority

of the cases, they are ill-prepared to start these courses, and we cannot go back and start teaching

basic, basic stuff." In this example as with the previous, the faculty member drew hard

distinctions between faculty and institutional responsibilities and student responsibilities, as if to defend the distance between the two.

Institutional context. Many faculty participants seemed to share a perception of their campuses as small, collegial environments supporting the opportunity for regular interaction between themselves and their students. This characterization was often contrasted to that of the state's large research universities. Particularly in reference to the classroom environment, a community college faculty member shared what he had perceived to be students' sentiments:

> [This institution] does a good job of making students feel like it's a big house or a big home or a welcoming area. There are some students that come from other campuses….They come in saying, "I really didn't connect with the instructor. We were in this big auditorium and I needed more help and I couldn't connect. I couldn't relate. I felt like I was just a number, where everyone else was okay with it." But to that one person they couldn't do it. But when they came here they're like "I got that extra attention. I was able to comprehend better. There's not that much going on and I can just focus."

In addition to the perceived benefits within the classroom environment, several faculty members shared ways the institutional context provided for more informal interactions between students and themselves outside of the classroom. A comment from a university faculty member illustrated this point, "With a small college, you get to see them in the hallway, talk to them and chat about all kinds of things, and that really builds up a good connection and relationship." In this and other similar examples, participants emphasized the "fit" between the regional and community college contexts on the one hand and the "needs" they perceived to be prevalent among their students. These examples highlighted the features of the institution that allow them to connect with students in ways they perceive to be helpful and effective.

Discussion

The results summarized here produce a somewhat complex picture of faculty practice, providing insight into how their understandings reflect widely held beliefs surrounding college success that may exclude, constrain, and disadvantage students with nontraditional characteristics or pathways. The approach taken in this study adds to our understanding of how these expectations may play out in students' experiences with faculty on campus.

Funds of Knowledge: Faculty Frameworks and Resources

The results of this study showed a predominant pattern in which faculty exhibited somewhat nuanced knowledge of students' multiple obligations. For example, as noted above, distinctions were drawn between "traditional" and "nontraditional" students on campus. In recognizing the diversity of situations structuring their students' lives, faculty comments often reflected a detailed and useful level of knowledge that helped them see and contextualize the complexities of their students' situations and, therefore, were better prepared to support them. For the most part, they had developed a praxis that considered students' multiple obligations in addition to college study. With a few exceptions, faculty on these campuses seemed at ease with the idea of adapting their practices to meet with the variation in students' life conditions and the multiple modes of college going that accompanied this variation.

And yet this adaptive stance is interesting in itself. Although some faculty participants drew on experiences that were similar to those of the students they served, most had themselves followed "traditional" college-going pathways, including full-time enrollment, dependent status, and part-time or no outside employment. As such, descriptions of students often started from a "traditional" image of college students and then *reworked* the details of a practical approach

aimed at that kind of experience—to make it relevant to the contrasting conditions they knew their own students faced.

Evidence of such adaptation was absent in the comments of some participants who veered into overgeneralization and stereotyping (e.g., "they're not prepared coming in, so they get lost and they get frustrated, and they leave…so that's that population that we deal with"), distancing and pejorative language (e.g., "What is prevalent over here is lack of interest"), or even expressions of futility (e.g., "The majority of the cases, they are ill-prepared to start these courses, and we cannot go back and start teaching basic, basic stuff"; "Many of them, they can't; that's the reality"). Some faculty members' comments seemed to associate adapting their classroom practice to better support the success of nontraditional students with lowered or looser standards. With these examples, faculty applied frameworks based on their own personal experiences, along with adaptive knowledge about their students' lives and obligations, and this formed the basis of their judgment and practice in supporting students' success. While these participants acknowledged and respected funds of knowledge, they were unable to advocate for anything other than the traditional modes of instruction in higher education. These faculty illustrate that knowledge may be the first step, but more is needed to achieve change in praxis to truly address the needs of students whose experiences are outside of the "traditional" norm and support their success. In its best forms, this is the type of knowledge and praxis that Bensimon (2007) and others have urged researchers to explore.

These perspectives are of particular concern within today's higher education landscape in which the "traditional" student is no longer the norm, as it is increasingly commonplace for students be working adults, commute to campus, attend part time, and attend more than one institution (Fox, Connolly, & Snyder, 2005; Soares, 2013; Staklis & Chen, 2010; Perna, Cooper,

& Li, 2006). The perceptions and beliefs held by these institutional actors as presented here are

important for understanding the context that shapes students' lives while they are in college and

may determine whether or not students are retained through graduation.

Stratification and Cultural Capital in Faculty Praxis

In addition, it is important to discuss the ways in which our findings resonate with

theories of how inequalities are perpetuated and disrupted. For decades researchers have

extended, critiqued, and refined the empirical base supporting Tinto's influential model of

student departure (e.g., Astin, 1993; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Hurtado, 1997; Jalomo,

1995; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005;

Porter, 1990; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992). Critiques of conceptualizations of

student departure for students who are not "traditional" have noted, in particular, that these

models based on academic and social integration do not adequately account for the positive

resources at students' disposal through their lives and experiences off campus. Instead, these

sources of potential positivity are framed as "external pulls." Furthermore, research in this

tradition typically fails to recognize the nondiscretionary necessity of work for great numbers of

students pursuing postsecondary degrees.

Participants' perceptions regarding students' "needs" in some cases rested on a sense of

the relatively low pressure associated with working at a regional institution, which was directly

and implicitly contrasted with a research university 'norm.' This reflects, to some extent, the role

of cultural capital in reinforcing the stratification of higher education. Faculty members'

comments in this vein revealed a rationale based on student comfort or needs in explaining the

concentration of first-generation and working students in regional campuses, making this

stratification seem normal, logical, or even adaptive.

Additionally, the findings of this study showed the faculty participants to be knowledgeable, though as discussed earlier, often drawing primarily on the framework of more "traditional" college-going experiences in their understanding. Additionally, they expressed worries over students' academic success, and true to flawed but highly influential student retention research models—as mentioned earlier in this section—they emphasized barriers and "external pulls" over resilience and strategy. In this vein many participants agreed that successful students who balance multiple roles do so through strategies that proactively manage and contain these "external pulls". Participants mentioned, for example, student strategies of compartmentalizing time for course work and benefitting from jobs aligned with their college studies and future career.

This is important to note, first, because it is not always possible or desirable for working, independent-status students and students with significant family obligations to achieve this kind of compartmentalization. In order for a parent to compartmentalize sufficient study time, for example, she or he must have access to reliable and flexible childcare. Likewise, employers of working students would need to offer flexibility, predictability, and sufficiently high wages to provide the context for the kind of compartmentalization of work and college responsibilities described in these interviews. This expectation (and praise) of compartmentalizing could also represent a lack of understanding of the issues faced by first-generation in college students. Some faculty members may see students as underprepared or uninterested, for example, when in reality as first-generation students they are actually only struggling to navigate college contexts.

To understand and support the academic success of nontraditional students broadly, campuses and researchers need to reorient to a norm incorporating these student experiences. This again highlights the role of cultural capital in how the faculty in this study have made sense

of their interactions with students on their campuses, as well as the role institutionalized norms may pervade not just policy and practice, but the understandings held by institutional actors, such as these faculty members, themselves.

Implications & Conclusion

This study helps articulate the perspectives and experiences of individuals most directly charged with supporting students and implementing state- and institution-level higher education policies. The findings from this work highlight the need to consider more research on how the experiences of students who do not fit a "traditional" model are interpreted by those in positions of power at higher education institutions. As such, we add to calls for more work that considers these institutional actors explicitly and how they shape student success.

Furthermore, this research has considerable implications for practice in enhancing understanding of faculty funds of knowledge, which can in turn be used to inform and develop more relevant praxis among those who serve critical roles along students' educational pathways. As such, the findings from this work support a continued call for better preparation of faculty to serve students who do not meet the prototype implicit in the materials and discussions that make up the preparation of the individuals who serve them. The institution has an obligation to help faculty understand that their own biases may not reflect the realities of students' lives. Moreover, those in charge of shaping the roles of faculty have a responsibility to develop and revise policies and practices so as to ground them in the realities of the students they serve.

This enhanced understanding may be realized, for instance, through professional development of faculty. Faculty members are typically trained within research universities, and may not have sufficient understanding of the realities of the students they will work with when working within diverse institution types (Austin, 2002). Consideration of alternative frameworks

for understanding and supporting these students is needed and should be incorporated in professional development. For instance, a community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) perspective could support faculty in resituating their perceptions of students to shift from a deficit view to one that better recognizes and appreciates students' experiences. This reorientation can support, at minimum, adaptation of practice, and with time potentially shift institutional structures and approaches.

Institutions might consider further exploration of faculty perceptions of student experiences, facilitating data-driven professional development discussions, for example, that pose stereotypes and other perceptions of students against institutional data disaggregated to consider in-depth analyses of differences across age, attendance patterns, and students' life experiences outside of school. These data-driven discussions may raise challenges to widely-held norms and values, and to expectations of who college students are and should be. This can provide an opportunity to create more closely targeted interventions to better support students, particularly those for whom traditional frameworks are ill-suited (Bensimon, 2005). In discussions where stereotypes, expectations or perceptions do not match up with the data, further opportunities for professional development can arise, pointing to promising directions for faculty members' professional development and for institutional policies and practices that support faculty in serving multiple student populations. Institutional policies regarding student pathways should consider the natural flow of students' lives rather than implicitly imposing images of "traditional" college-going on students for whom such assumptions are irrelevant or even detrimental.

Our work is an effort to draw attention to the influences on success for the significant population of students who are outside of the perpetuated archetype (older than 24, full-time, on-

campus), and to explore various aspects of their experiences (including faculty perceptions they encounter) through an anti-deficit framework that recognizes and appreciates the contributions these students bring to higher education campuses. This study makes explicit what some have assumed—that faculty are likely to draw on their own experiences in praxis. What is seldom discussed is the disconnect between their own experiences and the experiences of the students they serve. The findings have implications for faculty orientations at urban and commuter institutions and for faculty who serve nontraditional students. If institutions are to increase student success, then the actors within them will need to go beyond acknowledging various challenges faced by nontraditional students and act to transform norms and structures so as to provide support that is relevant and responsive to their experiences and needs.

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Table 1

Participant summary

	Total Number	Percent of Participants
Gender		
Male	15	50%
Female	15	50%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	6	20%
Latino/a	8	27%
White	16	53%
Institution Type		
Community College	20	67%
Regional University	10	33%