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2022

McNair Students, Scholarly Identity, and the University Libraries

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Libraries Fall Kick-Off

August 10, 2022

Background: The McNair Program

- Federally funded TRIO program

- First-generation, low-income college student and/or underrepresented in field in terms of race/ethnicity

- Support for first-generation students seeking graduate level degrees
  - Students design & complete research with a faculty mentor
  - Support for applying for & navigating graduate school

Libraries Collaboration with McNair

- Embedded librarian
  - Guest lectures
  - Office hours
  - McNair events
  - Meetings with subject librarians

Purpose & Research Questions

- How do first-generation college students experience becoming scholars?
  - Which aspects of the McNair Scholars program best support this process?
  - How can librarians use what we learn from students' experiences becoming scholars to inform library support?

Selected Literature Review

- LIS literature on librarians' identities, but very little on students' scholarly identity

- LIS literature on first-gen students changing from deficit thinking to asset-based models

- Mostly case studies on libraries working with TRIO programs; not much research

- What's new here: Focusing on the library's role in students' scholarly identity development

- Yosso's model of cultural community wealth

Methodology

- Qualitative case study
  - 22 participants
  - IRB approved

- Triangulation of data sources
  - Interviews at beginning & end of school year
  - 8 class observations
  - 4 assignments reflecting on scholarly identity

- COVID-19 impact

- NVivo software
  - Descriptive coding followed by theming the data categorially (Saldaña, 2021)

Analysis: Strengths

- Drive, curiosity
- Previous research experience
- Communities
- Research projects related to lived experiences
- Connecting multiple identities to self-image as scholar

Barry: Relationships that helped me push forward

"Even, like, the word [scholar] intimidates me a little bit, but I feel like the communities I've...I'm in, like, in the Mexican American community and Human Services, I've just built a lot of relationships that helped me push forward into this. And, again, it's, like, giving me more confidence to just, you know, toss that word around and call myself a scholar and just give me more confidence in regards to that kind of stuff."

Analysis: Barriers

- Discrimination
- Few role models on campus and in their fields
- Hidden curriculum
- Costs
- Tension between academia and students' values
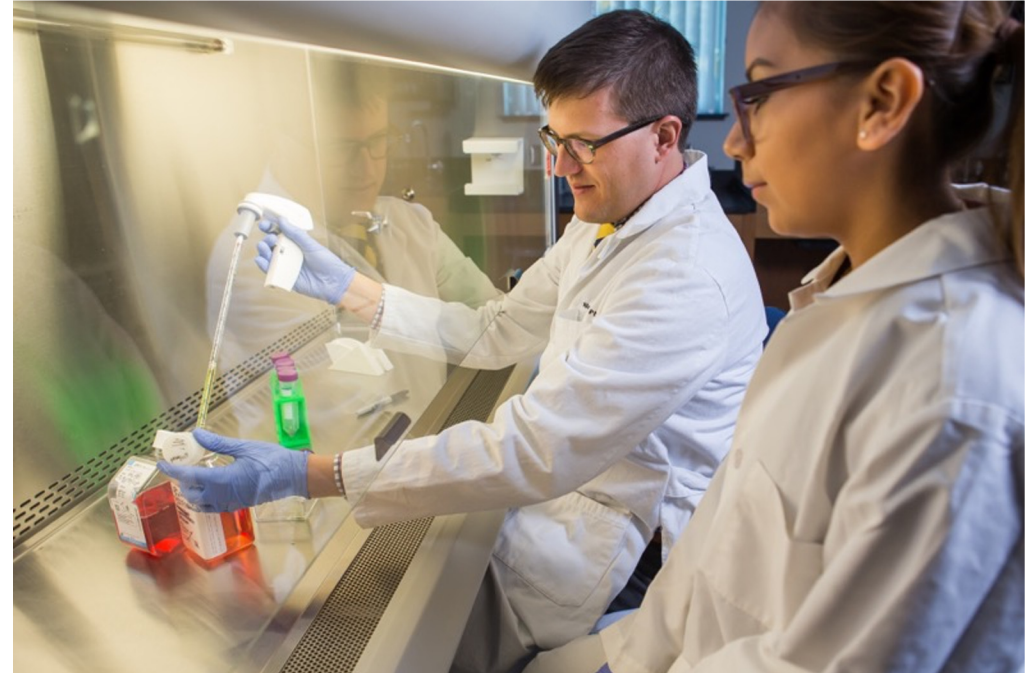
Violet: I'm here to break down those barriers

"The world is against me, I faced all of the challenges! [...] I'm first generation, me being who I am, I'm mixed—I'm Black and Hispanic—a woman, you know, [...] like, all things are put in place for...to see me not succeed. And that's, like, that's what made me succeed even more. [...] The tattoos and my skin color [...] do define who I am, but they don't, they don't affect my, like, my job etiquette, they don't affect my intelligence, like, I'm still doing the same things, even though I have tattoos, even though my skin color's darker, like, everything's just put in place to, like, not see us succeed, but I'm here to, like, break down those barriers."

Analysis: Support

- UNC faculty mentors
- Peers
- McNair staff
- Financial support
- UNC Libraries

Candy: Librarians are even really excited for you

"And sometimes they're even really excited for you as well. That's kind of motivating, going, 'He's excited, I should be excited 'cause this is interesting to other people as well.' […] For libraries, I really like that they've incorporated, like, these kinds of programs like McNair."

General Implications

- Culturally responsive support
- Hiring and retaining diverse faculty and staff
- Involving diverse students and faculty in designing services, collections, and spaces
- Showing up as whole people

What can we do in the Libraries?

- Use asset-based approaches

- Focus on becoming student-ready

- Be open to and positive about cultural difference

- Commit to lifelong learning

- Avoid thinking you know everything already

- Hire and retain diverse staff and faculty, including student employees

- What else?

Selected References

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What questions & comments do you have?

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