HELPING UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS: A MIXED-METHODS EVALUATION OF A COLLEGE RETENTION PROGRAM

Chair: Shannon Calderone

The goal to discover the effective elements of a retention program is part of the pragmatic epistemology of mixed-methods research. This research evaluated the effectiveness of a first-year retention program at an open-access university in the northwestern United States. The grade point averages and retention rates of students who participated in the program were compared against two groups of students: those who were eligible for the program but did not participate and other freshman students in the same academic year. Overall, most of the students who participated in the program earned higher GPAs than students who opted out of the program, but none of the differences were statistically significant. Additionally, the program improved student retention when compared with students who opted out of the program, but the differences in retention rates were not statistically significant. Qualitative data gathered from the students and staff who participated in the program provided some insight into the benefits and hindrances of the program as they pertain to social integration, institutional commitment, locus of control, self-efficacy, and achievement. The evaluation concludes with recommendations for improvement and future research.