STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE COMPLETION BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

Chair: Richard Sawyer

Student community college completion rates remain low. On average only about one in three students meet their goal of completing community college within three years. Community college students tend to face higher barriers to completion and represent a more diverse population than students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities. Responding to the needs and assets of community college students, community college leaders’ thinking represents a shift from open access to completion through the guided pathways model. Through this phenomenological study, the researcher explored four community college students’ perceptions of their experiences with barriers and facilitators of successful college completion. Based on the descriptions of their lived experiences, aspects of the formal guided pathways model helped or hindered their progress toward successful certificate or degree completion. Data analysis revealed three themes of student perceptions: (a) relational supports, (b) the impact of neoliberalism on students, and (c) the importance of high-quality learning. These perceptions aid in evaluating the impact of guided pathways on challenges, barriers, and facilitators of certificate and associate degree completions at community colleges in Washington state.