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New American Barriers to Higher Education

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Abstract

This is a qualitative investigation of barriers to New Americans in Maine in pursuing and continuing with higher education. Research will be based in Critical Race Theory and aims to involve professionals, New Americans in Maine and New Americans in Maine who have left the Social Work program at University of Southern Maine. History in the United States is rooted largely in the lived experience of the dominant patriarchal culture while at times inaccurately depicting other ethnicities, race and cultures. There is little research about New Americans attending school, and less still that is reflective of specific degree programs, particularly with Bachelor and Master degrees in the Social Work field. The current research project intends to fill some of the gaps in literature and practice in education regarding information on inclusive, culturally appropriate higher-education. The results will be determined after focus group and interviews have taken place. Once themes are identified, this information will be collated into a working document and presented to the University of Southern Maine and the CAC. The document is meant for review and utilization in framing future curriculum, addressing barriers identified to extend social work program and expand the profession in the community.

Background

According to a 2011 U.S. Census, there are approximately 80,000 in Maine who identify as “multicultural”, with at least 45,000 foreign born.

The many New American populations are not well-represented in the world of Social Work in the community in Maine.

This project is based on a grant proposal from Jeanette Andonian, MSW, PhD, LCSW along with the School of Social Work Community Advisory Committee

Concentration on discovering barriers to utilizing and succeeding in the USM MSW program.

Purpose

Exploring barriers for New Americans achieving higher education based on literature themes.

Methods

- Snow-ball recruitment
- Two focus groups
- Transcribing interviews
- Qualitative thematic analysis
- Data synthesizing through NVivo

“The language is the base for everything, its the basis for the equity for justice” – Participant 15

“The power of someone’s story you find common humanity” –Participant 11

“...but language for social worker or psychology, I need to spend three times more time on, to translate it to my language. I need to read again and again to see what they are telling, now I need to think and write my paper in English” –Participant 2

“I think there needs to be more outreach from schools/colleges to high schools to reach out to kids or in the community in general” – Participant 9

Figure 1. Prominent Quotes

Results

Prominent themes that emerged were language barriers, complications for transferring degrees from country of origin, resources advertising and supporting exploring higher education and English as a Second Language courses. Financial means to pay for higher education was touched upon in each of the two focus groups conducted as well as concerns related to discrimination. Finally, lack of presence in communities for University of Southern Maine was addressed as a barrier to attending, due to being unfamiliar with the college, courses offered and New American supports.

Conclusion

- Literature on this topic is lacking, additional and long-term studies should be conducted targeting higher education barriers in the United States, specifically related to the Social Work profession.
- The findings from this study provide a solid foundation to University of Southern Maine about barriers to recruiting and successfully supporting New Americans in completing a Social Work program.
- Targeted barriers for New Americans exploring higher education were language skills and strengths, community presence, discouragement of degree transferring and cost associated with this and lack of resources for financial needs for higher education.

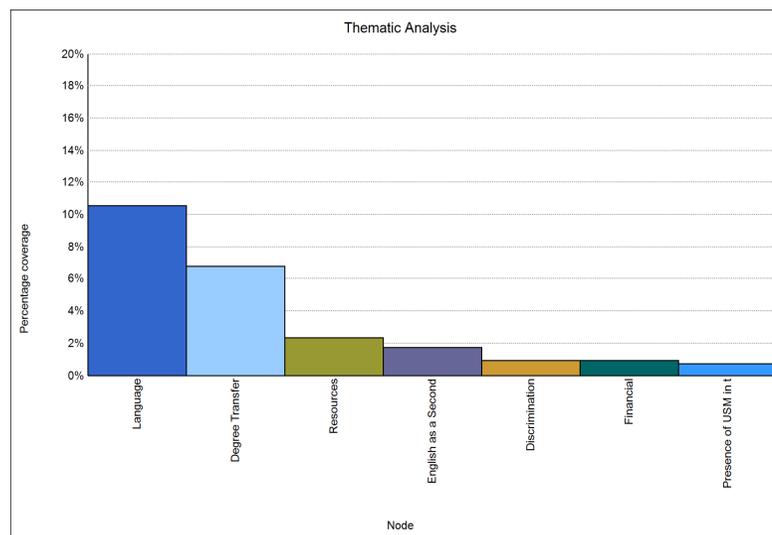


Figure 2. Prominent Themes

Acknowledgements

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References

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