The Missing Link Targeting Non-traditional Students: A Descriptive Content Analysis of University Websites

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Abstract

Non-traditional students are a rapidly growing segment of the non-traditional student (NTS) population attending U.S. colleges and universities. A content analysis was used in this study, to examine the availability of information designed for these students on universities’ Websites. Focal areas are Orientation, Career Counseling, Academic Advising, Financial Aid, and Childcare. Most of the universities researched do not have links (programs) that focus on these services intended for NTS. The findings of this study should motivate universities to develop and implement programs that functionally support the needs of this population and communicate their existence on their Web pages.

Enrollment at colleges and universities has been progressively rising since the 1970s (Lewin 2011; Munday 1976). Non-traditional students (NTS) are a significant segment of this growth in the United States (Wyatt 2011). A factor contributing to this population’s enrollment increase is the number of laid-off employees who return to college (Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Powell 2009). A second factor involves the increased educational requirements those in the job market face (Jones 1996). Third, enrollments increase with veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who pursue university education degrees (Rumann and Hamrick 2010). Finally, research suggests that on average a person’s higher education level is related to lower probability of unemployment, and a higher earning potential (Doyle and Gorbunov 2010; United States Department of Labor 2012). These factors are even more evident and important during times of economic crisis. One of the consequences of these factors and the current economic crisis is that more NTS are enrolling in colleges and universities (Doyle and Gorbunov 2010), which Munday (1976) documented as a common occurrence. For the purpose of this study, a NTS is defined as an individual who is over the age of 25.

The estimates of the NTS population’s size vary from source to source. The variance is attributable to the elasticity of the criteria used when defining or describing NTS. For example, in 2002 The United States Department of
and face the same difficulties; this idea seems counterintuitive. In other words, serving NTS for schools. The broad programs that colleges and universities support service program designed for NTS, classified by age, would facilitate minimal, two or three as moderate, and four or more as highly non-traditional. of these characteristics and others are present, NTS are classified from one as responsibility, race and gender, and enrollment patterns. Based on how many characteristics, such as age, family and financial responsibilities, work responsibilities, race and gender, and enrollment patterns. Based on how many of these characteristics and others are present, NTS are classified from one as minimal, two or three as moderate, and four or more as highly non-traditional. This method of classification makes the identification of their needs or the spotting of trends within their population difficult. A college and university support service program designed for NTS, classified by age, would facilitate serving NTS for schools. The broad programs that colleges and universities currently offer imply that, regardless of age, all students have the same needs and face the same difficulties; this idea seems counterintuitive. In other words, contrary to current belief, and based on completion records, providing the traditional programs or making minor adjustments to the existing programs, does not meet the needs of NTS.

The NTS, while being encouraged to return to colleges and/or universities, can easily get discouraged while navigating through the channels of higher education organizations (Wyatt 2011). Because colleges and universities are designed to meet the needs of traditional students, they lack the services and support programs designed with NTS’s needs in mind (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2000; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Rau 1999). This deficiency in services and support contributes to the poor completion record of this group (Powell 2009).

One of the ways colleges and universities can help NTS to succeed is to provide them with support programs and services tailored to their needs. The availability of these programs should be properly communicated (Wyatt 2011). Colleges and universities develop Websites with the intention of making information available, and accessible for the use of its stakeholders. Increasingly, the data indicate that the Web is the first place where people search when looking for information, including information about colleges and universities. As Wyatt (2011) concluded, accessibility of university Websites is important in communicating support services and program information designed for NTS.

The State of California has implemented the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC), which serves as a comprehensive statewide model. This program provides the information needed about the general education requirements for any California public post-secondary institution (USDE-CACSFA 2008). In addition to IGETC, California has a statewide database system (ASSIST), accessible to all students. ASSIST offers course and program requirements to students, under the transfer agreement between the California Community Colleges, the University of California (UC), and the California State University (CSU). Another important collaborative program to assist with the student transfer process is the Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG), by which community college students transferring to a four year university have priority over other applicants (University of California 2012). These programs increase the NTS’s enrollment at the university, given that 70 percent of university students transfer from community college; and three quarters of the community college population is considered non-traditional (Gonzalez 2001). The present study used a descriptive content analysis to examine California State University schools’ Web pages, in an effort to answer the following question: Do the Web pages of California State University schools identify support programs and services aimed at non-traditional students?
Non-traditional student enrollment in both colleges and universities has surpassed historical records (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999). Recently, the economic decline directly affected the job market, and many older individuals without a college degree found themselves once again searching for employment or a way to make themselves more employable (Doyle and Gourbunov 2010). These conditions motivated many individuals to go back to college, complete a specialty or technical certificate, or for many, earn a four year university degree that they assume will better equip them for the competitive job market (Doyle and Gourbunov 2010; Ely 1997; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Lake and Pushchak 2007; USDE 2000; USDE-NCES 2002). Military veterans are a second source of NTS. Many of them delayed their college educations while they were in service. Students 25 years or older, usually have four or more non-traditional characteristics: 1) 25 years or older; 2) financial independence; 3) full-time employment; and 4) dependants (their own children or other family members). Thus, a large number of NTS are considered highly non-traditional.

Non-traditional Student Population

A traditional student is defined as one that enrolls immediately after graduating from high school and completes the degree by age 24 (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; Philibert, Allen, and Elleven 2008). Also, the conventional or traditional student can be described as one who is 18-24 years old, resides on university grounds, and attends school full time as a product of the support afforded by the parents, economic assistance from grants and scholarships or both (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; Philibert, Allen, and Elleven 2008).

As previously stated, for the purpose of this study, the NTS is an individual over the age of 25 (Ely 1997; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Powell 2009). NTS are identified and referred to in numerous ways. NTS are also called adult learners, re-entry students, returning students, recyclers, OTAs or older than average students, mature-aged students, new students, and members of the new majority (Cross 1980; Ely 1997; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Tones et al. 2009).

In contrast, NTS are identified by a number of specific characteristics. Some of these characteristics include age, employment, family (in many cases NTS are parents and/or caregivers), and financial responsibilities associated with it (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999). Some studies have included characteristics of inadequate representation in their definition of NTS: these characteristics include gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, education, religion, finances, language, and lack of information, disability, and socio-economic status (Schuetze and Slowey 2002; Taylor and House 2010; USDE 2011). For the intention of the study, these characteristics of underrepresentation will not be considered.
by NTS are beyond the control of higher education organizations. Significant barriers are student finances, work, and family responsibilities.

**Student Finances**

The Congress Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance or USDE-CACSFSA (2008) discussed the consequences and challenges faced by those seeking higher education when dealing with the increases in tuition, fees, and expenses associated with earning a college degree. USDE-CACSFSA (2008) acknowledges in their report the difficult financial situation faced by the average working non-traditional student, which includes the burden of forgoing a portion of their income in order to attend school. The financial barriers faced by NTS are well documented. An independent congressional committee that met in 2009 reported on the negative results that increasing college and university fees and tuition have on the enrollment and persistence of traditional students as well as NTS.

According to Powell (2009), financial aid policies for grants and loans hurt working NTS in a number of ways. For example, federal education grants and loans are only available to students who enroll at least half time, provided they are not working full time. Many students who are enrolled half-time are working full time; thus they do not qualify for the assistance. Powell (2009) indicates that a large number of NTS need to fund the expenses associated with higher education by borrowing from costly private financing institutions and/or fund their college education using credit cards.

Family, finances, and work obligations are entwined. NTS, especially those who are single parents, must work to support their families. Working more hours reduces the time they can spend with their families. Family time gets compromised even further when attending school is added to the mix (Chartrand 1992).

**Family**

Non-traditional students’ priorities become: 1) work, 2) family, and then 3) school (Chartrand 1992). The NTS is more likely to encounter family obligations and work responsibilities; these responsibilities create conflicts with the student’s educational efforts (Clinton 2004). Research indicates, that family is one of the biggest challenges NTS face (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; Lansdown 2009; USDE-NCES 1992). Chartrand (1992) went so far as to claim that NTS’ high dropout rate can be directly attributed to conflicts resulting from family and work obligations.

Parents, especially single parents, seek out a safe, convenient, and affordable day care (Schuetze and Slowey 2002). Day care centers have been established by many colleges and universities, to provide the support needed for students with children while attending school. However, most day care centers are open during regular business hours, usually Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm. This schedule leaves NTS who are enrolled in evening and weekend courses without the use of on-campus day care services. These students must make other arrangements that can increase their cost of attending school, and decrease the quality of care their children receive.

**Work**

Combining school and work is not easy. The USDE reported in 2002 that two thirds of NTS consider themselves employees first. Generally, employers do not want to invest in training or promoting education for temporary workers (Lansdown 2009). Thus, a significant conflict with work and school schedules is created, and constraints of necessary funds needed to attend school are experienced by NTS as a consequence of lack of support from the workplace. Research supports that work, family responsibilities, and financial limitations are not the only barriers faced by NTS (Clinton 2004). The NTS population is faced with multiple other barriers, which only the universities and colleges have the control of implementing or modifying. These barriers are related to student support services such as modified orientation, career counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and family support services.

**College and University Actions that Influence Non-traditional Student Success Rates**

Problems arise when colleges and universities do not modify, or develop support service programs in the following areas: admissions orientation, career counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and childcare. Most institutions’ support services programs do not meet NTS needs (Frost 1980; Jones 2011; Schuetze and Slowey 2002).

**Student Support Services**

Colleges and universities have support services that are usually available during traditional business hours, making it difficult for students who attend school at night, on weekends, and/or online to access these services. According to Luzzo’s (1993) research results, NTS display higher levels of career decision making. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of counseling programs with the main goal of meeting the career development needs of NTS. In particular, colleges and universities should design career counseling methods that provide transparency and reassurance in the area of career decision making.

At the same level of importance as career counseling, NTS also need other support programs and services such as orientation, academic advising and child care (Schuetze and Slowey 2002). Schuetze and Slowey (2002) argue that strategic programs in these areas, designed for NTS, should be provided by university staff with special training and understanding of the NTS’s needs. Tones et al. (2009) add, that it is disconcerting that higher education institutions are not providing support services tailored to the needs of all students. Providing
these services creates stability and promotes success for the NTS population (Chartrand 1992; Frost 1980).

Numerous studies about NTS (Ely 1997; Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; O’Donnell and Tobbell 2007; USDE-CPES 2011; USDE-NCES 1993, 2003) suggest an array of labels, definitions, characteristics, needs, and predictors as well as statistics of how to better understand and serve this population of students. A number of scholars have looked at how to understand and better serve NTS (Chartrand 1992; Luzzo 1993; Schuetze and Slowey 2002). Research has also been conducted by the U.S. government, education agencies, and school boards across the nation, with the goal of designing programs with NTS in mind (Jones 2011). Some programs have been implemented, but for many programs support and services for evenings and weekends are excluded. According to Schuetze and Slowey (2002), the revolution of higher education has made it available not only to the privileged, but to the masses as well. At present, there is one important element of this change; little or no planning to integrate NTS as part of the masses has been addressed.

Orientation
The proper orientation is a vital exercise for prospective students, prior to a career decision and scheduling of classes (Tones et al. 2009). Communicating essential information to assist incoming students in making the appropriate decisions is as important as the availability of adequate financial aid. To accomplish this goal, it might be necessary to provide an in-depth orientation presented by multiple individuals with expertise in different areas of the school. It might also be advantageous to conduct the orientation in more than one 75-minute session.

Disappointingly often, educational institutions are not making the information concerning services offered available in a timely and accurate manner (Jones 2011). An appropriate orientation should assist the incoming student in understanding their options and help them maximize the opportunity in the areas of career, curriculum offered by the school, financial aid, and scholarships available (Lake and Pushchak 2007; USDE 2008). Moreover, higher education institutions should provide a support staff that is reachable, with a facilitator’s attitude, and willingness to make necessary adjustments to better serve non-traditional and traditional students as well (USDE 2008).

Attrition and Incompletion
Survey research demonstrates that NTS are at higher risk of withdrawal (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011; Lewin 2011; Monroe 2006). According to Doyle and Gorbunov (2010), 48% of these students drop-out, and only 28% complete a baccalaureate degree. Monroe’s (2006) research findings reaffirm that institutional communication is a key factor that affects student attrition. Schatzel et al. (2011) found that in the United States about eight million people have attended college, and have given up prior to completion. President Barack Obama made an announcement in February 2009, in which he expressed his clear objective to obtain the highest percentage of college graduates in the world by the year 2020 (Jones 2011). According to Jones (2011) President Obama’s plan includes the NTS population as a target to achieve this goal.

USDE-CACSFRA has considered NTS as a fast growing population in higher education (Jones 2011). This committee is concerned with NTS’s graduation records, which have been consistently lower than those of traditional students. USDE-CACSFRA also recognizes that financial aid is only one factor in promoting the success of NTS, and the committee argues how vital it is to control the price of higher education, in an effort not to price out NTS from obtaining their degrees. Another session meeting of this committee was planned for the summer 2011, with the goal of identifying the obstacles faced by NTS as well as the necessary steps the federal government is required to take, in order to mitigate such obstacles (Jones 2011). The outcome of this follow-up meeting has not yet been released.

Monroe (2006) believes that students (including many NTS) transferring from community colleges to universities have needs that are not addressed with urgency, because the universities do not consider them ideal students. Monroe (2006) also argues that the complexity of NTS and the statistics available demonstrate high attrition experienced by this population. This problem deserves a closer look. According to Doyle and Gorbunov (2010), NTS face challenges in making the transition from high school into higher education institutions; however, many more challenges for NTS exist such as financial limitations, work, and family responsibilities. Subsequently, institutions need to assist NTS to have an easier integration and to increase the probability of success.

In summary, the NTS population is growing. This growth is fueled by many factors including economic situations (Lake and Pushchak 2007; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Powell 2009), and returning veterans (Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Rumann and Hamrick 2010). Non-traditional students have both a low success rate (Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2011; Lewin 2011; Monroe 2006) and a high attrition rate (Chartrand 1992; Schatzel et al. 2011). Numerous factors contribute to the low success rate such as financial uncertainty (Powell 2009; Rau 1999; USDE-CACSFRA 2008), work-related concerns (Chartrand 1992; Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; Lansdown 2009; USDE-NCES 1992), family commitments (Chartrand 1992; Rau 1999; Schuetze and Slowey 2002), and academic preparation (Kimbrough and Weaver 1999; Levine 2000). Colleges and universities are contributing to this problem by not providing the appropriate orientation (Jones 2011; Tones et al. 2009; USDE-CACSFRA 2008), and students support services (Frost 1980; Gilardi and Guglielmetti 2000; Jones 2011; Rau 1999; Kenner and Weinerman 2011; Schuetze and Slowey 2002). The student support services aspect of the problem is the focus of this research effort.
Method

This study used a descriptive content analysis of 22 California State University (CSU) Websites, specifically information regarding programs and support services offered to NTS found on these Websites. The CSU is one of the nation’s largest public university systems open to all applicants, with over 400,000 students enrolled. As such, its actions and programs can potentially become practices followed by other school systems. The CSU is a classic and interdependent system; it promotes an all-inclusive education program. The primary focus is providing undergraduate education to the state’s diverse population of students (John Williams, pers. comm.). At present, approximately 70% of CSU’s enrollment is community college students that transferred to a CSU school or students that previously attended a community college (Gonzalez 2001).

Currently, the World Wide Web is the most common tool used to find information. Going paperless has become an integral component of a green and sustainable way of conducting business (Gordon and Pathak 1998). Universities are building Websites with the intent of making it the point of contact for those inquiring; while making information available at all times.

The following categories were considered and guided the research: A) Time (used to determine how long it takes to find the information); B) Admissions orientation; C) Career planning and placement; D) Academic advising (general and discipline); E) Financial aid programs; F) Office of Financial aid operating hours; and G) Family support services (such as childcare). The questions for each area were formulated to create a code book (see Appendix A).

The CSU system is comprised of 23 schools. This study reports on the findings from 22 campuses, excluding the California Maritime Academy. The Maritime Academy, while technically recognized as a part of the CSU system, is a nautical specialty training school and does not offer the conventional four year education program as the other 22 campuses (see Appendix B).

Results

This study examined Websites maintained by 22 of the 23 schools that comprise the largest state university system in the nation (based on enrollment). The results reported involve the coding outcomes of seven variables intended to describe specific aspects of a school’s Website. Specifically, the coding was used to gather data about the support services offered by each school in the areas of: Orientation, Career Counseling, Academic Advising, Financial Aid and Childcare availability. The amount of time it took to code each Website was also measured. The findings demonstrate that programs designed to support and service NTS are not highlighted or easy to find on the Websites maintained by these 22 universities.

The outcome is reported on a variable-by-variable basis. All the data are contained in a single table (see Appendix C).

Support Service Areas

Time

This variable focused on how long, in minutes, it took for the coder to search each school’s Website. Search times ranged from as short as 12 minutes to as long as 34 minutes. The mean search time was 24.18 minutes.

Orientation

This variable measured the absence or presence of orientation programs for NTS. Based on the coding, five (22.7%) of the 22 schools conduct orientation programs for NTS.

Career Counseling

The career counseling and planning variable measured the absence or presence of services and programs (such as job fairs and workshops) offered by the school to NTS. The goal was to identify such programs intended for NTS. Only two (9%) of the 22 schools that were coded offered career counseling programs designed for NTS.

Academic Advising

This variable was used to determine if academic advising (general and discipline) for NTS could be found. This information targeting NTS was available in one (4.5%) of the 22 schools coded.

Financial Aid

Two variables were used to describe the support service of financial aid. The first variable examined the availability of financial aid programs directed at NTS. The variable of program availability was measured in terms of the presence or absence of financial aid programs aimed for NTS. None (0%) of the 22 Websites coded had language or links indicating that the school had financial aid programs intended for NTS.

The second variable measured the Financial Aid Office hours of operation. The variable could be coded in one of four ways as described in the code book. The results indicate that seven (31.8%) of the schools offered evening hours. Two (9%) of the schools had Financial Aid Offices that offered both evening and weekend service hours. Thirteen (59%) of the schools did not offer evening or weekend hours.

Family Support Services

The family support services (childcare) variable looked at the hours that childcare service was offered. The key objective was to identify if this service was offered during the evening and/or weekend hours. A considerable number of NTS have...
young children that need care while parents attend school (Rau 1999; Schuetze and Slowey 2002). Twenty (90.9%) of the schools coded, offered this service during the day Monday to Friday, but only one (4.5%) of those 22 coded schools offered that service during the evenings and/or weekends.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to describe the information aimed at NTS on Websites maintained by 22 of the 23 schools that comprise the largest state university system in the nation. Availability of important information, such as Orientation, Academic Advising, Career Counseling, and Financial Aid, is viewed as essential to assisting the NTS population in its efforts to complete their degree objectives.

This study found weak points in these school’s Websites regarding the support services offered to the NTS population. In today’s busy society, time is highly valued; finding information quickly is useful and imperative. It is important to note that 12 minutes spent searching for information is not considered a short time. NTS are not immune to the frustrations that many people feel at having to spend more than five to ten minutes searching for what they need/want. Frequently, the first source of information for prospective students, including NTS, is the university’s Website (Gordon and Pathak 1998).

In addition, this study’s outcome confirms findings from other studies, which indicate that colleges and universities need to be more proactive in implementing programs to better address the needs of this significant student population. Drucker (1995) promotes what he calls “management of change” which means that organizations ought to be in a state of constant improvement in order to cope with the fast changing pace of consumers. This management approach, if implemented in higher education organizations, can benefit the fast changing student population.

Given the increased numbers of NTS attending colleges and universities, it is unsatisfactory to find that 100 percent of the schools coded did not provide Website information about financial aid programs targeting NTS and that 95.5 percent of the schools coded did not offer information about academic advising and childcare programs for them. Given previous research, it is entirely possible that the lack of Website information signals a lack of these programs. This outcome does not confirm that such programs do not exist at these schools. However if they exist, the results suggest that NTS who use the school’s Website will have trouble locating them, and/or would not find them at all.

On the more positive side of the findings, 31.8 percent of schools coded, had financial aid office hours extending into the evening, and 22.7 percent have orientation programs available for NTS. No patterns were detected based on the geographical location of a school, or the size of the schools’ student population. The student population ranges in size from 8,586 students at the smallest campus to 35,557 at the largest campus. The schools are located in both urban and rural areas.

Limitations

It is possible that the coding scheme used did not capture important support programs and services presently offered to NTS. This study examined information contained on 22 campuses of one state’s public university system’s Websites. The information obtained may not be used to generalize to other states. Furthermore, this sample is not representative of other universities and colleges such as private institutions, for profit schools, schools that primarily offer their classes on line, trade schools, or other professional universities that target non-traditional students. It is also important to note that these support programs and services may be offered but not promoted on school Websites. Although all 22 schools are part of one large university system, they did not have identically designed Websites. The lack of a uniform design produced its own set of navigational issues which complicates the interpretation of the time variable. Thus, the school that earned shortest time spent on a Website was not necessarily the one with the easiest search. In the same manner, longer time spent on a particular Website may be equivalent to poor design. The possibility exists that poorly designed Websites simply hide or make it impossible to find programs intended for the NTS population.

Further Research

Further studies may examine the same questions addressed here, but applied to a wider category of universities would generate a larger set of data. Luzzo (1993) suggested additional research in the areas of career and academic advising to identify the needs of non-traditional students in higher education. Although this present study was conducted almost 20 years after Luzzo’s suggestion, the results today are consistent with what Luzzo (1993) found in the area of career counseling. These results demonstrate that progress in career counseling, academic advising, and orientation is still inadequate, and further research is necessary.
References


Philibert, Nanette, Jeff Allen, and Russell Elleven. 2008. “Non-traditional Students in Community Colleges and the Model of College Outcomes for
Adults.” *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* 32 (8): 582-596.


Appendix A

Code Book

1. Time to find information: The number of minutes the researcher needed to search university’s Web pages for answers to the other items in the code book.
   Using the computer time application, noted the time searching ______ Time started, ______ Time ended, ______ and Time total

2. Admissions Office Orientation: Any orientation programs identified as intended for NTS, this would include any program (hyperlink) that uses the phrase “non-traditional student” or a recognized synonym for NTS.
   Recorded as yes if the website featured NTS admissions orientation ______ Yes, or ______ No

3. Career Counseling Programs: Career counseling program such as job fairs, or workshops identified as intended for NTS, including any program (hyperlink) that uses the phrase “non-traditional student” or a recognized synonym for NTS.
   Recorded as yes if the website featured career counseling programs for NTS ______ Yes, or ______ No

4. Academic Advising Programs: Academic advising programs (hyperlinks) identified as intended for NTS, including any program (link) that uses the phrase “non-traditional student” or a recognized synonym for NTS.
   Recorded as yes if the website included academic advising programs for NTS ______ Yes, or ______ No

5. Financial Aid Programs: Financial aid programs (hyperlinks) identified as intended for NTS, including any program (link) that uses the phrase “non-traditional student” or a recognized synonym for NTS.
   Recorded as yes if the website featured financial aid programs for NTS ______ Yes, or ______ No

6. Financial Aid Office Availability (Hours): Financial aid office operating hours, paying special attention to whether the office was open during the evenings (after 5:00 p.m.) or on weekends.
   Recorded the financial aid office operating hours as being open on ______ (A) Yes evenings only, ______ (B) Yes weekends only, ______ (C) Yes both evenings and weekends, ______ (D) No hours on either evenings or weekends

7. Childcare Options (Evenings/Weekends): Childcare availability during the evenings or on the weekends.
   Recorded childcare services as available on ______ (A) Yes evenings only, ______ (B) Yes weekends only, ______ (C) Yes both evenings and weekends, ______ (D) No hours on either evenings or weekends, ______ (E) No child care available

Appendix B

Universities included are:
1. California State University, Bakersfield
2. California State University, Channel Islands
3. California State University, Chico
4. California State University, Dominguez Hills
5. California State University, East Bay
6. California State University, Fresno
7. California State University, Fullerton
8. Humboldt State University
9. California State University, Long Beach
10. California State University, Los Angeles
11. California State University, Monterey Bay
12. California State University, Northridge
13. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
14. California State University, Sacramento
15. California State University, San Bernardino
16. San Diego State University
17. San Francisco State University
18. San Jose State University
19. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
20. California State University, San Marcos
21. Sonoma State University
22. California State University, Stanislaus
What Influences Some Black Males to Sell Drugs During Their Adolescence?

Tatiana Starr Daniels
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Abstract

This research study examined participants' individual interpretations of the processes, experiences, and contexts of selling drugs in adolescence. The research exposed common themes emerging from the participants' own words. Individuals discussed exposure and ease of access to the drug market, how and at what age they began selling drugs, their reliance on the activity, and motives for remaining in the life. This study will contribute to existing research by informing programs and policies focused on community and youth development and diminishing and preventing the drug trade.

Black males selling drugs in their adolescence is intertwined with many other social problems, such as poverty (Leviton, Schindler, and Orleans 1994; MacLeod 1995; Okundaye 1999; Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005), violence (Black and Hausman 2008; McLennan et al. 2008; Stanton and Galbraith 1994), parental drug use (Little and Steinberg 2006), single parent/absent father homes (Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001), high school dropout rates, and disproportionate rates of black males in overpopulated jails and prisons (Garrison 2011; Livingston and Nahimana 2006; Provine 2011). As Moore (1995) points out:

[a] black male's environment (i.e., socioeconomic situation) can play a major role in his choice to use or sell drugs. All too often the victim is blamed for his condition without any further investigation of the factors that influenced his decision to participate in the behavior. (114)

Therefore, perspectives that involve blaming young black males for selling drugs will only perpetuate marginalization because they fail to address the root of the issue. Instead, youth that sell drugs should be considered a serious social problem that requires informed research and collective action to understand it. By doing so, researchers can expand their understanding of what can be done to eliminate such contextual factors that influence the behavior. Moreover, once this information is obtained, it can then inform future research that is needed in the areas of designing and running productive and efficient adult and youth drug treatment programs focused on preventing and recovering from the selling of drugs. Unfortunately, these programs practically do not exist (Centers and Weist 1997). In general, minimal research exists on the topic of black males that sell

Table 1

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marcos</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanislaus</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variables key:
Time (minutes), Admissions Office Orientation (AOO), Career Counseling Programs (CCP), Academic Advising Programs (AAP), Financial Aid Programs (FAP), Financial Aid Office (FAO), and Childcare Options (CCO). The ✓ indicates that the correspondent support service is available at that particular school and the x signifies that the service is not available. The letters (A-E) within the table refer to the following: A= Evenings only; B= Weekends only; C= Both evenings and weekends; D= No hours on either evenings or weekends; and E= No childcare available (under CCO only).