

From: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu> <ciloh@uci.edu>
Sent time: 03/28/2019 03:02:26 PM
To: journal <journal@colostate.edu>
Subject: for update as soon as possible (article)
Attachments: iloh_Journal format manuscript_updated.pdf iloh_Journal format manuscript_updated.docx

Greetings SAHE,

I hope this email finds you well! My name is Constance Iloh and I published an article with you. I have attached the article format version but with minor errors corrected. It is still the exact number of pages as it was and all paragraphs correspond to the exact same pages as before. The references are also all the same, with the exception of two references added to the references list. Please update the PDF you have online with this version at your earliest convenience.

I did not know there wasn't a copy editing stage, after receiving a revise and resubmit and then an acceptance. I wanted to make sure I took time to carefully correct any errors following my return from family tragedies.

Thank you so much for your attention to this message and please let me know as soon as possible that it has been updated. Thank you again for your time and work.

Warm regards,

Constance Iloh, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Higher Education

.....
University of California, Irvine
School of Education
Irvine, CA 92697-5500

From: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Sent time: 12/13/2019 12:01:27 PM
To: ciloh@uci.edu
Cc: Faircloth,Susan <Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu>; Metzger,Teresa <Teresa.Metzger@ColoState.EDU>
Subject: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs
Attachments: Iloh turnitin report page 26.pdf Iloh turnitin report page 27.pdf Iloh turnitin report page 28.pdf Iloh turnitin report page 29.pdf Iloh turnitin report page 30.pdf Iloh turnitin report page 31.pdf

Dear Dr. Iloh,

I am glad we had the chance to talk during ASHE. I regret this situation keeps dogging you, but I must follow up on your article published in the 2018 issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. After running our own plagiarism check through TurnItIn, we have discovered that there is significant cause for concern. I have attached the pages of your article with the report from the scan. As you will see, it is particularly in your literature review - though not isolated there - where there is direct use of others' words, including whole sentences, without proper attribution. The most significant of which include the improper use of work by Chen (2017), Ke (2010), and Panacci (2015), as well as of your own work and a Concordia University website.

After discussing options with the Dean of our College of Health and Human Sciences, Dr. Lise Youngblade, and Director of the School of Education, Dr. Susan Faircloth, we have come to the following decision and course of action. First, please note that your article for now has been removed from the 2018 edition of the journal that is available online and your name and article title have been removed from the Table of Contents. Second, in recognition of the fact that you did try to make revisions to your article but it was after it had already been published, we would like to invite you to resubmit your manuscript with the plagiarism issues noted in the reports corrected. You may have until January 31 to make these corrections. Upon receipt of your revised manuscript, we will scan it again and assuming all issues have been corrected, we will republish the article online with an errata note that it was originally published in 2018 and revised due to errors in attribution.

If you do not wish to revise and resubmit your article at this time, that is your choice. *JSA* must then note in the journal archives that your article was pulled from the issue due to significant errors in attribution.

I regret that we must take this course of action, but the integrity of the journal and these students' work as editors must be upheld. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions and to let me know if you plan to take corrective action.

Sincerely,

D-L STEWART, PhD
(they/them/their, he/him/his - [learn the importance of using people's proper pronouns](#))

Professor and Co-Chair
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Co-Director, Campus Initiatives
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During Fall semester, my schedule is heavily blocked from Wednesday through Friday with meetings, advising appointments, class, and research/scholarship time. I appreciate your patience as non-urgent messages received on these days likely will receive a significantly delayed response. Thank you.

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E. d-l.stewart@colostate.edu
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File name: cSAHE-journal-2018_26.pdf (45.58K)
Word count: 456
Character count: 2833

5
Not Non-traditional, the New Normal: Adult Learners and the Role of Student Affairs in Supporting Older College Students

Constance Iloh, Ph.D.
 University of California, Irvine

Abstract

7
The higher education student population is consistently shifting. The financially dependent, 18-year-old high school graduate who enrolls full-time is not the “typical college student.” College has increasingly become the pursuit of older students seeking or returning to secure postsecondary credentials and degrees. The author argues that the growing adult student population must be better recognized and prioritized in student affairs to increase access, outcomes, and effectiveness for adult learners. Accordingly, the author highlights the unique and complex profiles of adult learners while also putting forth new directions for improving conditions for adult learners through student affairs practice. In particular, this text addresses the role of institutional research and non-deficit language and practices in student affairs to cultivate supportive and thriving educational spaces for adult learners. Ultimately, this text highlights how radical shifts and changes to our postsecondary education landscape require new and inclusive ways of practice and improving student conditions.

Keywords: adult learners, emerging trends, higher education, higher education practice, nontraditional students, postsecondary education, student affairs

1
 Much of what we know about student affairs practice is largely a result of a focus and research on traditionally-aged college students. While these efforts have provided substantial information to guide the field of higher education, they are inherently limited by their intentional and narrow focus on younger student populations with traditional trajectories. I argue that a continued focus on “traditionally” aged students will only cripple our ability to advance 21st century higher education practice. This text underscores the importance of a student affairs profession that is attentive to the changing landscape of higher education in general, and the growing number of adult students entering college in particular.

Student Affairs and the Changing Student Landscape

6
 If achievement, satisfaction, persistence, and learning are a priority in postsecondary education, institutions of higher learning must have student affairs professionals whose contributions complement and help an institution realize its goals (Whit, 2005). The underlying fundamental mission of student affairs is to serve; the profession exists to ensure that students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education (Long, 2012). With the growing diversity of the 21st century higher education student population, student affairs professionals and colleges are facing greater challenges in providing multidimensional programs and services necessary for expansive student success and satisfaction (Wang, 2013).

3
 Specifically, many colleges and universities have struggled to adapt to this changing student marketplace, often finding themselves burdened by traditions and practices that prove ill-suited for older students (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000). Adult learners

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are largely invisible to higher education (Coulter & Mandell, 2012). An American Council for Education (ACE) survey found that more than 40% of institutions indicated that they “did not identify older adult students for purposes of outreach, programs and services, or financial aid” (Lakin, 2009). When they do, the prevailing view of adult learners is that they are “one-dimensional” (Lakin, 2009) and focused predominantly on lifelong learning. Overall, there is a paucity of research and data on adult learners (Cruce & Hillman, 2012) and what has been conducted has mainly been descriptive analyses in policy reports (Irvine & Kevan, 2017). Between 1990 and 2003, only one percent of articles in seven widely circulated peer-reviewed higher education journals focused on adult learners (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). Understanding the unique needs of adult learners is critical to designing higher education systems, practices, and policies that support this population and promote their success.

The Post-Traditional Student Population

Adult learners are part of a growing “post-traditional” student population, usually defined as aged 25 and over, but also include those under 25 who have characteristics indicative of adult responsibilities, such as working full-time, being financially independent, having non-spousal dependents, being a single parent, as well as having a nontraditional educational trajectory, such as delayed enrollment into higher education or did not complete high school (Chen, 2017; Soares, 2013). By many measures these “non-traditional” students have become the norm in postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015; Westervelt, 2016). A key characteristic distinguishing post-traditional from other college students is the high likelihood that they are juggling other life roles while attending school, including those of worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member (Ross-Gordon, 2011). More often, these multiple roles present challenges in students’ allocation of time for both academic study and participation in campus-based organizations and activities (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Adult Learners

Every time we call college students ‘kids,’ we reinforce a subtle and problematic depiction. The minimized presence of adult learners is rooted in the historic youth-centered focus in postsecondary education (Chen, 2017). College is generally assumed to be a phase of life for young persons, and a milestone for those leaving adolescence and entering into young adulthood (Kasworm, 2005; Kasworm, 2010). Research on higher education has been predominantly based in historical perspectives, beliefs, and curriculum of a traditional student profile. This profile consists of persons between 18 and 22 years of age and who do not have other major responsibilities or roles that compete with their studies (e.g., full-time employment, parenting, and community responsibilities) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005). However, contemporary higher education reflects increasing diversity and distance from this traditional student profile. As a major grouping, adult students now comprise more than 38% of all students enrolled in higher education (National Student Clearinghouse, 2012).

Some argue that “adult students have particular characteristics that set them apart from nontraditional students” and these characteristics “deserve our attention and the recognition that these students are a distinct group” (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006, pp. 73-74). In Compton et al.’s definition, adult students are 25 years old and older who are, “more likely to be pursuing a program leading to a vocational certificate or degree,” “have focused goals for their education, typically to gain or enhance work skills,” and “may consider themselves primarily workers and not students” (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006, p. 74). While there are different definitions of nontraditional students, mature students, and adult students, all

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File name: cSAHE-journal-2018_28.pdf (33.37K)
Word count: 582
Character count: 3522

Three are commonly used to refer to “nontraditionally aged” students. Many of these students are participating in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles (Iloh, 2017). Throughout this text, when I reference adult students, this indicates adults age 25 or older participating in higher education.

Adult students have unique needs, especially if they are employed. Among others, these needs include: different kinds of information about their educational options, institutional flexibility in curricular and support services, academic and motivational advising supportive of their life and career goals, recognition of experience, and learning that incorporates previous work experience (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000). Although more adults are enrolling in college, motivated primarily by their potential economic mobility, they must overcome the many economic, personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional challenges in their way. For these reasons, support for post-traditional students in college should be different than the support needed for traditional 18-24-year-olds who have entered higher education immediately after graduating from high school (Chen, 2017).

Using Institutional Research

It is important for student affairs professionals to use institutional research to understand and analyze student adult learner data in order to develop programs and support services. Specifically, student affairs practitioners at any institution can utilize enrollment data to understand trends in their student population as well as certain programs, practices, and efforts that can be scaled up or down, depending on the adult learner population. These practices are especially important for student affairs professionals that work at colleges that are underfunded and must be precise and efficient with every resource. Using institutional research to expand and restrict services, resources, and programs based on demands from adult learners will help institutions better structure the scarce resources, if any, that they are given towards supporting adult learners.

In addition to utilizing data that has already been collected, it will be important for practitioners to collect new information in relation to support and services for adult learners. This might include surveys and interviews to understand the experiences of students ages 25 and older. In some cases, practitioners might invest in understanding if their campus is perceived as accessible to adult learners. While institutions of higher learning may not have policies restricting adult learners from enrolling, the extent to which students feel welcome at that campus is an entirely different matter. Practitioners can utilize these interviews and other instruments to develop data-driven processes and practices to better attract, serve and support prospective and current adult learners on their campus.

Strength-based Approaches over Deficit Perspectives

Colleges and universities are not compromising their academic standards by being intentional about how they can better serve the adult learner population. Rather, it is an opportunity to illustrate their rigor and accessibility, which is a feat not all institutions of higher learning have taken on. In identifying students as adult learners, student affairs professionals have an opportunity to identify and celebrate the assets this population brings to an educational environment. As a result, students would be less likely to be treated less than or encouraged to assimilate to the approaches of their peers. Language plays an important role in restructuring how practitioners, adult learners, and other students, staff, and faculty view adult students (Iloh, 2017). Throughout this text, I refer to students typically labeled as “nontraditional” as “post-traditional”, for categorical reasons, but also to challenge problematic terminology (Soares, 2013). The term “nontraditional student” is somewhat of a misnomer, as today’s college

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3 student population consists of many adult learners 2th jobs, families, and responsibilities outside of school (Education Advisory Board, 2016). The continued and frequent labeling of the majority of college students as nontraditional is a form of othering that adversely impacts these students' ability to successfully persist in many educational settings (Yancey Gulley, 2016). Using such language suggests, "We are going out on a limb by letting you attend college because this place 1e is not really designed for you, and you really should not be here" (Yancey Gulley, 2016). Usage of the term nontraditional will not bring us closer to equity-minded and student-centered practices and instead, minoritizes one of the fastest growing student populations in higher education.

In addition to rethinking deficit language and terminology in student affairs practice, it is important to develop campus or online educational climates that honor adult learners as important agents that are changing the culture and mission of higher education for the better. Adult learners are forcing institutions of higher learning to develop practices that do not assume a one-size-fits-all approach is the best approach for students in postsecondary education. Adult learners bring a variety of rich experiences, knowledge, and communities to any educational environment (Ross-Gordon, 2011). On one hand, this could mean academic affairs professionals thinking more intently about curriculum that merges previous experience and advances 1ces the ideals of lifelong learning. On another hand, this might mean professionals making sure events for students, especially those events catered to students that often are not served adequately, also welcome their families or are considerate of part-time and full-time schedules. One-stop-shop academic and career counseling services will help ensure adult learners do not need to track down multiple campus resources 4hile also helping campus services become more centralized and cohesive. As a field, large student affairs professional organizations such as NASPA and ACPA can also bring in specialists and students as guest speakers to educate student affairs professionals and scholars on necessary directions for adult learners. Measures such as these at the institutional and professional organization level are useful in ensuring professionals are embedded in ecosystems that support them as they seek to better support adult learners at their institutions.

Conclusion

Equity and excellence are often discussed as ideals and agendas of higher education, although in reality they are much harder to achieve in practice. Higher education cannot consider itself equitable or excellent if it fails to serve or address the presence and needs of the growing majority of 21st century college students. Adult learners represent not only the present, but future of higher education. Accordingly, this text highlights the immense opportunity for the student affairs profession to advance commitments of expansive excellence, through recognition, support, and strength-based solutions for adult learners.

Dr. Constance Iloh is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the University of California, Irvine.

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Character count: 2800

References

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- 1 Westervelt, E. (2016, September 25). Shaken by economic change, 'non-traditional' students are becoming the new normal. *National Public Radio*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/09/25/495188445/shaken-by-economic-change-non-traditional-students-are-becoming-the-new-normal>
- 3 Whitt, E. J. (2005). Promoting student success: What student affairs can do (Occasional Paper No. 5). Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.
- 2 Yancey Gulley, N. (2016, August 5). The myth of the nontraditional student. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/05/defining-students-nontraditional-inaccurate-and-damaging-essay>

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Sent time: 12/13/2019 01:57:23 PM
To: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu>
Cc: Metzger,Teresa <Teresa.Metzger@ColoState.EDU>
Subject: Re: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs

Thank you. We'll review this and get back to you soon.

D-L STEWART, PhD
(they/them/their, he/him/his - [learn the importance of using people's proper pronouns](#))

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Twitter: @DrDLStewart

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From: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu>
Sent: Friday, December 13, 2019 1:54 PM
To: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Cc: Metzger,Teresa <Teresa.Metzger@ColoState.EDU>
Subject: Re: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs

Greetings,

Please find the updated article attached. Thank you.

Kind regards,

On Fri, Dec 13, 2019 at 12:45 PM Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> wrote:

Great. When you do, please send it directly to me with a copy to Teresa Metzger, teresa.metzger@colostate.edu.
Thank you and have a great weekend,
D-L

D-L STEWART, PhD
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W. <https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/bio-page?person=dafina-lazarus-stewart-2292>

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Sent: Friday, December 13, 2019 1:21 PM

To: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>

Subject: Re: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs

Thank you! I am happy to resubmit it. I will resubmit now the new version. Thank you!

Best,

On Fri, Dec 13, 2019 at 12:06 PM Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> wrote:

Dear Dr. Iloh,

I am glad we had the chance to talk during ASHE. I regret this situation keeps dogging you, but I must follow up on your article published in the 2018 issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. After running our own plagiarism check through TurnItIn, we have discovered that there is significant cause for concern. I have attached the pages of your article with the report from the scan. As you will see, it is particularly in your literature review - though not isolated there - where there is direct use of others' words, including whole sentences, without proper attribution. The most significant of which include the improper use of work by Chen (2017), Ke (2010), and Panacci (2015), as well as of your own work and a Concordia University website.

After discussing options with the Dean of our College of Health and Human Sciences, Dr. Lise Youngblade, and Director of the School of Education, Dr. Susan Faircloth, we have come to the following decision and course of action. First, please note that your article for now has been removed from the 2018 edition of the journal that is available online and your name and article title have been removed from the Table of Contents. Second, in recognition of the fact that you did try to make revisions to your article but it was after it had already been published, we would like to invite you to resubmit your manuscript with the plagiarism issues noted in the reports corrected. You may have until January 31 to make these corrections. Upon receipt of your revised manuscript, we will scan it again and assuming all issues have been corrected, we will republish the article online with an errata note that it was originally published in 2018 and revised due to errors in attribution.

If you do not wish to revise and resubmit your article at this time, that is your choice. *JSA* must then note in the journal archives that your article was pulled from the issue due to significant errors in attribution.

I regret that we must take this course of action, but the integrity of the journal and these students' work as editors must be upheld. Feel free to reach out to me with any questions and to let me know if you plan to take corrective action.

Sincerely,

D-L STEWART, PhD

(they/them/their, he/him/his - [learn the importance of using people's proper pronouns](#))

Professor and Co-Chair

Student Affairs in Higher Education (SAHE)c

Co-Director, Campus Initiatives

Race and Intersectional Studies in Educational Equity (RISE) Center

During Fall semester, my schedule is heavily blocked from Wednesday through Friday with meetings, advising appointments, class, and research/scholarship time. I appreciate your patience as non-urgent messages received on these days likely will receive a significantly delayed response. Thank you.

P. 970-491-5805

E. d-l.stewart@colostate.edu

W. <https://www.chhs.colostate.edu/bio-page?person=dafina-lazarus-stewart-2292>

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Constance Iloh, Ph.D.

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University of California, Irvine

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From: Faircloth,Susan <Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu> <Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu>
Sent time: 12/15/2019 07:54:27 AM
To: ciloh@uci.edu; Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Cc: Metzger,Teresa <Teresa.Metzger@ColoState.EDU>; Youngblade,Lise <Lise.Youngblade@ColoState.EDU>
Subject: Re: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs

Dr. Stewart,

Thank you for working with Dr. Iloh to address this matter.

Regards,

Susan

Susan C. Faircloth, Ph.D.
(Enrolled Member, Coharie Tribe)
Professor & Director, School of Education
Colorado State University
1588 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1588
970-491-5169 (Office)

Pronouns: She, Hers, Her

From: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Sent: Friday, December 13, 2019 1:01:27 PM
To: ciloh@uci.edu <ciloh@uci.edu>
Cc: Faircloth,Susan <Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu>; Metzger,Teresa <Teresa.Metzger@ColoState.EDU>
Subject: Your article in CSU's Journal of Student Affairs

Dear Dr. Iloh,

I am glad we had the chance to talk during ASHE. I regret this situation keeps dogging you, but I must follow up on your article published in the 2018 issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. After running our own plagiarism check through TurnItIn, we have discovered that there is significant cause for concern. I have attached the pages of your article with the report from the scan. As you will see, it is particularly in your literature review - though not isolated there - where there is direct use of others' words, including whole sentences, without proper attribution. The most significant of which include the improper use of work by Chen (2017), Ke (2010), and Panacci (2015), as well as of your own work and a Concordia University website.

After discussing options with the Dean of our College of Health and Human Sciences, Dr. Lise Youngblade, and Director of the School of Education, Dr. Susan Faircloth, we have come to the following decision and course of action. First, please note that your article for now has been removed from the 2018 edition of the journal that is available online and your name and article title have been removed from the Table of Contents. Second, in recognition of the fact that you did try to make revisions to your article but it was after it had already been published, we would like to invite you to resubmit your manuscript with the plagiarism issues noted in the reports corrected. You may have until January 31 to make these corrections. Upon receipt of your revised manuscript, we will scan it again and assuming all issues have been corrected, we will republish the article online with an errata note that it was originally published in 2018 and revised due to errors in attribution.

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From: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Sent time: 03/25/2020 01:28:59 PM
To: ciloh@uci.edu
Cc: Faircloth,Susan <Susan.Faircloth@colostate.edu>; journal <journal@colostate.edu>
Subject: Your submission to the Journal of Student Affairs
Attachments: iloh_Journal format manuscript_updated.docx.pdf

Dear Constance,

What uncertain and challenging times we are facing. Truly, I never imagined having to support faculty to navigate a mid-semester shift to online learning due to a viral pandemic. I hope you are doing well in the midst of this challenge and that you and your family are healthy and well.

I'm writing today about your article in the 2018 volume of the *Journal of Student Affairs*. Although I know this is unlikely to be a priority at this time, I wanted to alleviate any ambiguity you may have about this manuscript. First, I apologize that this response has been so significantly delayed. Between the hectic end of fall semester and my going on leave for most of the beginning of this semester, as well as conferring with others, I could not respond sooner.

I have reviewed your revised manuscript. Although the percentages of individual similar content is very small, I still find issues with inappropriate use of secondary sources appearing as primary sources. In other words and as one example, using a quote of Chen's work that appeared in another author's work but not noting it as "Chen, year as cited in Author B, year." I've attached the report from a plagiarism checker so that you may review it yourself. The highlighting of verbiage that appears in student manuscripts did not factor into our decision as we believe it is more likely that these students plagiarized your article, not the other way around.

Consequently, it is thought that the core issues found with the original manuscript, although reduced, are still evident due to not appropriately attributing secondary sources (often from Chen). Due to this, it has been determined that the article still cannot be published.

Unfortunately, there was only one opportunity to remedy these issues. Since we are unable to accept this revision, your article will not be replaced in the 2018 volume of the *Journal of Student Affairs*.

I sincerely regret this outcome and wish you the best as you move your work forward.

Sincerely,
D-L

D-L STEWART, PhD
(they/them/their, he/him/his - [learn the importance of using people's proper pronouns](#))

Professor and Co-Chair
Student Affairs in Higher Education ([SAHE](#))

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Word count: 2672

Character count: 16367

1 Not Non-traditional, the New Normal: Adult Learners and the Role of Student Affairs in Supporting Older College Students

Constance Iloh, Ph.D.
University of California, Irvine

Abstract 7

The higher education student population is consistently shifting. The financially dependent, 18-year-old high school graduate who enrolls full-time is not the “typical college student.” College has increasingly become the pursuit of older students seeking or returning to secure postsecondary credentials and degrees. The author argues that the growing adult student population must be better recognized and prioritized in student affairs to increase access, outcomes, and effectiveness for adult learners. Accordingly, the author highlights the unique and complex profiles of adult learners while also putting forth new directions for improving conditions for adult learners through student affairs practice. In particular, this text addresses the role of institutional research and non-deficit language and practices in student affairs to cultivate supportive and thriving educational spaces for adult learners. Ultimately, this text highlights how radical shifts and changes to our postsecondary education landscape require new and inclusive ways of practice and improving student conditions.

Keywords: adult learners, emerging trends, higher education, higher education practice, nontraditional students, postsecondary education, student affairs

1 Much of what we know about student affairs practice is largely a result of a focus and research on traditionally-aged college students. While these efforts have provided substantial information to guide the field of higher education, they are inherently limited by their intentional and narrow focus on younger student populations with traditional trajectories. I argue that a continued focus on “traditionally” aged students will only cripple our ability to advance 21st century higher education practice. This text underscores the importance of a student affairs profession that is attentive to the changing landscape of higher education in general, and the growing number of adult students entering college in particular.

Student Affairs and the Changing Student Landscape

If “achievement, satisfaction, persistence, and learning are a priority” in the realm of postsecondary education, certainly the student affairs profession must play a central role in the realization of these desired outcomes (Whit, 2005, p.1). “The underlying fundamental mission of student affairs is to serve; the profession exists to ensure that students are safe, cared for, well treated, and (more or less) satisfied with their higher education” (Long, 2012, p. 7-8). 10 In the growing diversity of the 21st century higher education student population, student affairs professionals and colleges are facing greater challenges in providing multidimensional programs and services necessary for expansive student success and satisfaction (Wang, 2013).

Specifically, many colleges and universities are challenged in their ability to “adapt to this changing student marketplace, often finding themselves burdened by traditions and practices that prove ill-suited” towards older students (Dauer & Absher, 2015, p. 99). Adult learners are routinely rendered invisible in higher education (Coulter & Mandell, 2012). As reported by Chen (2017, p. 2), an American Council for Education (ACE) study revealed that over 40% of institutions of higher learning “did not identify older adult students for purposes of outreach, programs and services, or financial aid and if they do, the prevailing view of adult learners is that they are “one-dimensional.” Currently, descriptive articles, policy documents, and reports dominate the research on adult learners, which is considerably small compared to the robust research on college students aged 18-24 (Chen, 2017; Cruce & Hillman, 2012; Irvine & Kevan, 9 17). Between 1990 and 2003, just one percent of articles published in seven highly regarded and widely read peer-reviewed higher education journals focused on adult learners (Donaldson & Townsend, 2007). Understanding the specific needs and circumstances of adult learners is critical towards creating and implementing postsecondary education spaces, praxis, and reform conducive to this population’s success (Chao, DeRocco, & Flynn, 2007).

The Post-traditional Student Population

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Adult learners are part of a growing ["post-traditional"] student presence, usually defined as "aged 25 and over, but also include those under 25 who have characteristics indicative of adult responsibilities, such as working full-time, financial independence, having non-spousal dependents, being a single parent, as well as having a less conventional educational trajectory, such as delayed enrollment into postsecondary education or not completing high school" (Chen, 2017, p. 1). Louis Soares (2013), who coined term "post-traditional", asserts these students essentially reflect a new normal. "A key characteristic distinguishing [post-traditional] students from other college students is the likelihood they are juggling other life roles while attending school, including those of worker, partner, parent, caregiver, and community member which challenges students' allocation of time for academic study and participation in campus-based activities (Ross-Gordon, 2011)." Accordingly, it is important to consider these multiple roles likely mean a different collegiate experience.

Adult Learners

Each time we refer to college students as "kids," we reinforce a subtle and problematic depiction. The minimized presence of adult learners stems from a focus on youth in postsecondary education (Chen, 2017). College is usually considered a chapter of life for younger people, and a milestone for those leaving adolescence and entering into their adulthood (Kasworm, 2005; Kasworm, 2010). This profile consists of persons "between 18 and 22 years of age and who do not have other major responsibilities or roles that compete with their studies (e.g., full-time employment, parenting, and community responsibilities)" (Panacci, 2015). It is for these reasons the higher education research and literature is often severely outdated. However, contemporary higher education reflects increasing diversity and distance from this traditional student profile. As a growing population, adult students now represent over than 38% of all students enrolled in postsecondary education (National Student Clearinghouse, 2012).

It has been contended that because of the distinguishing features of adult learners from the rest of the "non-traditional" student demographic, specific attention to this group is warranted (Cotton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006; Panacci, 2015). These students, although a considerable category of their own, are often lumped into a larger pool of students considered "nontraditional" that encompasses a number of other identities, such as full-or part-time student status, first-generation, and those who have served in the military. "While there are different definitions of nontraditional students, mature students, and adult students, all three are commonly used to refer to "nontraditionally aged" students who participate in higher education primarily for career-related reasons while having other major responsibilities and roles" (Panacci, 2015). Throughout this text, when I reference adult students, this indicates adults age 25 or older participating in higher education.

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Adult students often have other sets of postsecondary education needs, especially if they are employed. Among others, these needs include: different kinds of information about their educational options, a college curriculum and set of embedded supports that is flexible and conducive to their complex lifestyle, an advisory system aligned with career goals, and educational offerings that incorporate their prior educational and professional experience (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2000). It is also important to consider unique challenges, such as "the lack of time to pursue education; family responsibilities; scheduling of course time and place; as well as limited financial means and the cost of educational courses" (Soares, 2013, p.8). For these reasons, resources and support systems for post-traditional students in college should be different than that which is provided for traditional 18-24-year-olds who have entered higher education immediately after graduating from high school (Chen, 2017).

Using Institutional Research

6

It is important for student affairs professionals to use institutional research to understand and analyze student adult learner data in order to develop programs and support services. Specifically, student affairs practitioners at any institution can utilize enrollment data to understand trends in their student population as well as certain programs, practices, and efforts that can be scaled up or down, depending on the adult learner population. These practices are especially important for student affairs professionals that work at colleges that are underfunded and must be precise and efficient with every resource. Using institutional research to expand and restrict services, resources, and programs based on demands from adult learners will help institutions better structure the scarce resources, if any, that they are given towards supporting adult learners.

In addition to utilizing data that has already been collected, it will be important for practitioners to collect new information in relation to support and services for adult learners. This might include surveys and interviews to understand the experiences of students ages 25 and older. In some cases, practitioners might invest in understanding if their campus is perceived as accessible to adult learners. While institutions of higher learning may not have policies restricting adult learners from enrolling, the extent to which students feel welcome at that campus is an entirely different matter. Practitioners can utilize these interviews and other instruments to develop data-driven processes and practices to better attract, serve and support prospective and current adult learners on their campus.

Strength-based Approaches over Deficit Perspectives

Colleges and universities are not compromising or sacrificing their academic standards by being intentional about how they can better serve the adult learner population. Rather, it is an opportunity to illustrate their rigor and accessibility, which is a feat not all institutions of higher learning have taken on. In identifying students as adult learners, student affairs professionals have an opportunity to identify and celebrate the assets this population brings to an educational environment. As a result, students would be less likely to be treated less than or encouraged to assimilate to the approaches of their peers. Language plays an important role in restructuring how practitioners, adult learners, and other students, staff, and faculty view adult students (Iloh, 2017). Throughout this text, I refer to students typically labeled as “nontraditional” as “post-traditional,” for categorical reasons, but also to challenge problematic terminology (Soares, 2013). The term “nontraditional student” is deceptive, since the college student of today reflects a population with many types of students often problematically positioned as other: students with jobs, families, those with out-of-school responsibilities, and older students (Education Advisory Board, 2016). “The frequent labeling of the majority of college students as nontraditional is a form of othering that adversely impacts these students’ ability to successfully persist and remain in many educational settings” (Yancey Gulley, 2016). According to Yancey Gulley (2016), this framing suggests, “We are going out on a limb by telling you attend college because this place is not really designed for you, and you really should not be here.” Usage of the term nontraditional will not bring us closer to equity-minded and student-centered practices and instead, minoritizes one of the fastest growing student populations in higher education.

In addition to rethinking deficit language and terminology in student affairs practice, it is important to develop campus or online educational climates that honor adult learners as important agents that are changing the culture and mission of higher education for the better. Adult learners are forcing institutions of higher learning to develop practices that do not assume a one-size-fits-all approach is the best approach for students in postsecondary education. Adult learners bring a variety of rich experiences, knowledge, and communities to any educational environment (Ross-Gordon, 2011). On one hand, this could mean academic affairs professionals thinking more intently about curriculum that merges previous experience and advances the ideals of lifelong learning. On another hand, this might mean professionals making sure events for students, especially those events catered to students that often are not served adequately, also welcome their families or are considerate of part-time and full-time schedules. One-stop-shop academic and career counseling services will help ensure adult learners do not need to track down multiple campus resources while also helping campus services become more centralized and cohesive. As a field, large student affairs professional organizations such as NASPA and ACPA can also bring in specialists and students as guest speakers to educate student affairs professionals and scholars on necessary directions for adult learners. Measures such as these at the institutional and professional organization level are useful in ensuring professionals are embedded in ecosystems that support them as they seek to better support adult learners at their institutions.

Conclusion

Equity and excellence are often discussed as ideals and agendas of higher education, although in reality they are much harder to achieve in practice. Higher education cannot consider itself equitable or excellent if it fails to serve or address the presence and needs of the growing majority of 21st century college students. Adult learners represent not only the present, but future of higher education. Accordingly, this text highlights the immense opportunity for the student affairs profession to advance commitments of expansive excellence, through recognition, support, and strength-based solutions for adult learners.

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From: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Sent time: 03/25/2020 01:59:27 PM
To: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu>
Subject: Re: Your submission to the Journal of Student Affairs

Take good care of yourself.

D-L

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•

From: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2020 2:40 PM
To: Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu>
Subject: Re: Your submission to the Journal of Student Affairs

No worries, it is fine just being left it out. Thanks for your correspondence and I hope you are taking good care. I am not even sure what version I sent when I received your first email (as I was dealing with family deaths but wanted to respond given the nature), but these issues will never arise again. I apologize for any inconvenience.

Best,

On Wed, Mar 25, 2020 at 1:31 PM Stewart,DL <d-l.stewart@colostate.edu> wrote:

Dear Constance,

What uncertain and challenging times we are facing. Truly, I never imagined having to support faculty to navigate a mid-semester shift to online learning due to a viral pandemic. I hope you are doing well in the midst of this challenge and that you and your family are healthy and well.

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I have reviewed your revised manuscript. Although the percentages of individual similar content is very small, I still find issues with inappropriate use of secondary sources appearing as primary sources. In other words and as one example, using a quote of Chen's work that appeared in another author's work but not noting it as "Chen, year as cited in Author

B, year." I've attached the report from a plagiarism checker so that you may review it yourself. The highlighting of verbiage that appears in student manuscripts did not factor into our decision as we believe it is more likely that these students plagiarized your article, not the other way around.

Consequently, it is thought that the core issues found with the original manuscript, although reduced, are still evident due to not appropriately attributing secondary sources (often from Chen). Due to this, it has been determined that the article still cannot be published.

Unfortunately, there was only one opportunity to remedy these issues. Since we are unable to accept this revision, your article will not be replaced in the 2018 volume of the *Journal of Student Affairs*.

I sincerely regret this outcome and wish you the best as you move your work forward.

Sincerely,
D-L

D-L STEWART, PhD
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Toward a New Model of College “Choice” for a Twenty-First-Century Context

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The past two decades have seen massive changes in the higher education landscape, including the heightened participation of post-traditional students, high reentry and mobility of students within and across sectors, and the increased visibility of open admissions institutions, such as community colleges and for-profit colleges. Despite these radical shifts, the most commonly used college choice frameworks still focus on the decisions of students who fit a stereotypical profile and are entering traditional institutions of higher learning for the first time. In this article, Constance Iloh argues for the necessity of a new conceptual approach and offers a three-component ecological model of college-going decisions and trajectories that incorporates the pressing conditions and shifting contexts of twenty-first-century postsecondary education. In doing so, Iloh also asserts that the concept of “choice” may be a limited and problematic way of understanding present-day college-going.

Keywords: college choice, theory, higher education, ecology, context of education, postsecondary education

Whether someone goes to college matters. A high school diploma is often not sufficient to achieve economic well-being in today’s society (Pew Research Center, 2014), which is increasingly divided by income. Income is highly correlated with education, with higher earners having at least a degree or certificate (Zeidenberg, 2008). For reasons such as this, postsecondary education has been characterized as one of the greatest hopes for financial and social progress for underserved communities (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Moreover, participation in college is often positioned as an investment for the broader community and nation. It is estimated that by 2020, two-thirds of jobs will require college experience, with 30 percent of those jobs requiring at least

a bachelor's degree and 36 percent requiring at least some college or an associate degree (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

Where someone goes to college matters. Higher education mirrors other industries in its variety of providers and options with distinct value propositions (Iloh, 2016). Each option comes with separate and unequal costs and outcomes. Now more than ever, the American postsecondary system resembles a dual system, with half of the annual enrollments concentrated in "competitive" four-year colleges and the other half concentrated in for-profit colleges, community colleges, and other sub-baccalaureate institutions (Carnevale et al., 2013). American colleges are arrayed along a spectrum of selectivity, from those that have few requirements other than the high school diploma to those that scrutinize academic records and admit only a small fraction from a pool of highly accomplished applicants (Heil, Reisel, & Attewell, 2014). The *where* of college choice is particularly important, since just going to college has not resolved racial disparities in wealth in the United States. The median White adult who attended college has 7.2 and 3.9 times more wealth than Black and Latino adults, respectively (Traub, Sullivan, Meschede, & Shapiro, 2017). One of the potential reasons offered in the literature is that Black and Latino students are underrepresented at the nation's most well-funded and well-resourced selective four-year colleges and universities but overrepresented at more open-access and underresourced two-year colleges (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013).

But why does someone go to a certain college? College choice theory, "the process through which students decide whether and where to go to college" (Bergerson, 2009, p. 2), has often been the lens through which the *why* and *where* of college are put into focus. I argue in this article that in the twenty-first century, this pivotal framework falls short of helping us grasp the realities and complexities of college-going. I begin by discussing college choice theory and its most common conceptions. In particular, I highlight the ways in which the dominant model does not account for the important contextual factors of opportunity, time, and information and their interdependent relationship in college decisions and trajectories. In illustrating the limitations of the dominant college choice model, I then highlight three dimensions changing higher education that reflect the increasing necessity of new approaches for college choice: post-traditional students, reentering as well as highly mobile college students, and open admissions institutions of higher learning. Next, I introduce the Illoh model of college-going decisions and trajectories that is composed of three interdependent contexts (information, time, and opportunity). I close the article with a discussion of the limitations of "choice" for understanding contemporary college-going.

College Choice Theory

College choice theory is considered from a variety of perspectives, much like the problems of access to higher education are studied in multiple social sci-

ence disciplines (e.g., economics, psychology, history, anthropology, sociology) and applied fields (e.g., public policy). Historically, the college choice process has been framed by multiple perspectives, most notably sociological and economic (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990). The economic perspective regards college enrollment as the result of a rational process by which an individual estimates the economic and social benefits of attending college, comparing them with those of competing alternatives (Manski & Wise, 1983). The sociological approach examines the extent to which high school graduates' socioeconomic characteristics and academic preparation predispose them to enroll at a particular type of college and to aspire to a particular level of postsecondary educational attainment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Other models combine multiple approaches (e.g., Perna, 2006) or take on different approaches. For example, the consumer approach explores intentional marketing and branding efforts by colleges and universities and the considerations of the prospective student/consumer (Clayton, 2013; Paulsen, 1990; Stephenson, Heckert, & Yerger, 2016).

One area of empirical research on college choice focuses on how students aspiring to postsecondary education develop a college choice set or college options, decide where to apply, and, conditional on admission, make their enrollment decisions (Hearn, 1984; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990; Zemsky & Oedel, 1983). An important insight from these studies is that high-achieving students and those from high-income families apply to more schools, to more selective schools, and to more costly schools (Niu & Tienda, 2008). Another line of research emphasizes how institutional characteristics, such as cost, size, distance, the quality of academic programs, and the availability of financial aid, influence college decision making (Manski & Wise, 1983; Montgomery, 2002; Long, 2003; Niu & Tienda, 2008; Niu, Tienda, & Cortes, 2006). Both approaches clearly indicate that "the patterns of college choice are stitched deeply into the social and economic fabric of the nation" (Zemsky & Oedel, 1983, p. 44).

Early college choice research holds that some of the most important influences on college choice are factors related to parents, the students themselves, and institutional characteristics (Chapman, 1981; Hearn, 1991; Hossler et al., 1989; Stage & Hossler, 1989). Examples of parental influences are parent income, parent education, and parent encouragement and support. Student characteristics include factors such as socioeconomic class, academic ability, educational aspiration, gender, and ethnicity (Center on Education Policy, 2012). Institutional factors include institutional reputation, location, cost of attendance, academic and nonacademic programs, religious affiliation, social atmosphere, and size (Pampaloni, 2010).

Numerous models have been developed and proposed as ways to understand the process of choosing a college. The three-stage model developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) is one of the most widely cited (Cabrera &

La Nasa, 2000; Freeman & Thomas, 2002; Gao, 2011; Hossler, Hu, & Schmit, 1999; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2002; Niu & Tienda, 2008; Pitre, 2006; Stewart, 2017) and has been commonly adopted as the dominant framework to understand college enrollment. It simplifies a highly complex process into a comprehensive and manageable three-stage model and explains the sequencing and timing of a student's college choice. This model suggests that decisions to go to college are the result of a process that begins as early as the seventh grade and ends when the high school graduate enrolls at an institution of higher education (Hossler et al., 1989). In undergoing each phase of the college choice process, a high school student develops a *predisposition* to attend college, conducts a *search* for information about college, and makes a *choice* that leads them to enroll at a particular institution (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The literature also suggests that these three stages interact with one another, each affecting the others in subtle ways.

Limitations of the Dominant College Choice Model

The dominant choice model is not without its limitations, many of which I aim to reconcile in the model I introduce in this article. Because Hossler and Gallagher's 1987 model is sequential in nature, little is known about the timing of these three stages for the growing group of students who do not fit a "traditional" student image (Perna, 2006). For traditional college enrollment (immediately after graduating from high school), predisposition typically occurs between the seventh and tenth grades, search during the tenth through twelfth grades, and choice during the eleventh and twelfth grades (Hossler et al., 1999; Perna, 2006). It is a challenge, then, when a dominant choice model accounts for only part of the college-going population and neglects the growing post-traditional student population.

The dominant college choice model focuses on college as a onetime event. However, the typical twenty-first-century student will likely attend more than one college on the path to a degree or credential. Given this, it is not clear whether the dominant model loops back around or starts all over in its representation of the many students who exit college and return at some later point in time. Nor does it indicate what becomes of college options as this process happens.

The ecosystem around the person also seems to take a back seat to the model's three stages. A high school student will likely have a different search process and information than will someone beginning college several years after high school. Further, the context of opportunity might constrain one person from even considering one college but enable another. Because the dominant model masks nuances of constructs such as time, information, and opportunity present in a student's ecosystem, it is more challenging to ascertain the status and conditions of college choice and educational access and stratification.

Although the models of the past may be considered outdated, Shaw et al. (2009) suggest that they do "provide a foundation to understand the current college choice process" (p. 665). Indeed, the dominant college choice model and similar others are fundamental to our past and current understanding of college choice because they showcase important components of the path from college aspirations to enrollment. At the same time, many of these approaches fall short of situating the reality of twenty-first-century higher education.

New Directions in College Choice Theory

Much of what we know about college student decision making is a result of studies conducted with public and private high school students who select four-year residential colleges and universities. While the models and empirical research have provided substantial information about these students and contexts, they are limited by their intentional and narrow focus on certain populations and institutional settings. Three specific trends often omitted are the growth of post-traditional students, returning and highly mobile students, and open admissions institutions of higher learning.

Post-Traditional Students

In this article, I underscore the importance of theory that is attentive to the changing landscape of higher education in general and the growing number of "post-traditional students" (Soares, 2013) entering higher education in particular—those students twenty-five and over as well as those under twenty-five but who have characteristics indicative of adult responsibilities, such as working full-time, being financially independent, having nonspousal dependents, being a single parent, and having a nontraditional educational trajectory, such as delayed enrollment into higher education or noncompletion of high school (Chen, 2017; Horn & Carroll, 1996). By many measures, these "nontraditional" students have become the norm in postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015; Westervelt, 2016), representing over 38 percent of the postsecondary population in the United States (Ross-Gordon, 2011). And while post-traditional learners have been a growing presence in US higher education institutions since the late 1970s (Chen, 2017), they have not been addressed explicitly in most college enrollment models and frameworks (Iloh, 2017).

Currently, the college choice considerations of these post-traditional students are marginalized in education research, even though the stereotyped image of the residential, full-time 18- to 23-year-old represents only about 15 percent of the higher education student population (Soares, 2013). Documenting college-going trajectories of post-traditional students will contribute to the diversity and accuracy of information policy makers can access when considering higher education governance, regulation, and funding. Furthermore, a new and specific theory of college choice rooted in the dynamics and

lived experiences of a diverse array of adults will move us from fitting students into a theory to bringing us closer to approaches that appropriately fit, or reflect, contemporary students.

The lack of a nuanced perspective and the square peg in a round hole view of post-traditional students is rooted in the historic youth centrality of postsecondary education (Chen, 2017). College is generally regarded as a phase of life for young people and a milestone for those leaving adolescence and entering young adulthood (Kasworm, 2005, 2010). Further, higher education policy is almost entirely driven by memories of the four-year, residential experience most policy makers had (AACRAO, 2015), though only a small minority of students still experience higher education that way. Understanding how the college selection process differs for various types of students is essential if higher education leaders and administrators are to make efficient and effective decisions regarding student recruitment and admissions (Litten, 1982).

Increasing Student Reentry and Mobility Across Higher Education

At a time when policy makers are intensifying calls to get more students in and through college, over 31 million adults are in limbo, having completed some college but not enough to earn a degree or certificate (NSCRC, 2014). Of those individuals, about 4 million (12 percent) are potential graduates who have at least two years of progress toward a degree or certificate (NSCRC, 2014). In 2014, 2,535,946 adult learners who reentered higher education between 2005 and 2008 still had not completed their degree (American Council on Education, 2014). With nearly 40 percent of higher education institutions not meeting their enrollment goals (Hoover & Lipka, 2016), it is time to understand the trajectories and challenges of the growing “some college experience, no degree” population, particularly those still seeking a higher education credential.

Many non-first-time (NFT) students are also post-traditional; they typically balance work, family, and other commitments that ebb and flow in intensity over the course of their academic career. Yet, the term *non-first-time* refers only to enrollment patterns, not other post-traditional student attributes (Inside Track, 2015). To date, there is little research and conceptual understanding of students who reenter higher education and/or attend multiple institutions. Thus, higher education leaders lack data and frameworks for the growing majority of NFT students they serve (AACRAO, 2015).

The nation’s first effort to benchmark persistence patterns of NFTs found that only 33.7 percent completed their degree, compared with 54.1 percent of first-time students (American Council on Education, 2014). The study also found that NFT students are more likely to complete an associate degree if they combine full-time and part-time enrollment. With such complex trajectories and concerning outcomes, understanding the college decisions of NFT students is critical for addressing problems in twenty-first-century higher education as well as reaching national goals of educational attainment and

economic competitiveness that cannot be achieved by only enrolling and graduating traditional-age first-time college students (Pusser et al., 2007).

Open Admissions Institutions in Higher Education

While most college choice literature focuses on the criteria and pathways to selective and highly competitive colleges, there is a need for a more in-depth understanding of college choice for spaces that rely on minimal and basic requirements for entrance (Iloh & Tierney, 2014a). The focus on one type of institution (e.g., selective public and private four-year institutions) misses other institutional contexts reflected in the broader higher education marketplace (Iloh & Tierney, 2014b; Kumar & Hurwitz, 2015). In reality, institutions with open admissions policies, including many for-profit colleges and community colleges, coexist with highly selective four-year institutions (Kumar & Hurwitz, 2015). And while not all community colleges and for-profit colleges have open admissions, most of their missions and purposes are aligned to operate as such (Iloh & Tierney, 2013).

Institutions with more flexible and open admissions are important for multiple reasons. First, they alter the structure of opportunity. In considering the context of opportunity, many students might find these spaces as viable pathways, especially if they have a limited knowledge of any problematic outcomes at those colleges or lack awareness of opportunities at more selective institutions. Open admissions institutions are also important sites for understanding the educational pathways of the many post-traditional, low-income, and racially minoritized students they enroll (Hirose-Wong, 1999; Illoh, 2016, 2017; Illoh & Toldson, 2013; Pusser & Levin, 2009; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). The open admissions nature of these institutions and the high mobility of students to and from these spaces are especially critical to understanding the contemporary ebb and flow of college-going trajectories.

Toward an Ecological Model of College-Going Trajectories

How can a different approach to the study of college choice better center the conditions, experiences, and students of twenty-first-century postsecondary education? First, it is appropriate to recognize that education research must grapple with aberrations in theory from reality, rather than simply ignoring how research is lagging behind on-the-ground realities. As an alternative to extant theories, I propose an ecological framework crafted to account for the complex ecosystems and trajectories of the current college student and landscape.

Why Ecology?

The strength of ecological models is that they are rooted in context. They are embedded in a broader contextualist paradigm which, in contrast to more positivist perspectives, argues for a multiplicity of realities or that people's

perceptions of reality are necessarily constrained and shaped by their specific circumstances (Tudge, 2008). From a conceptual perspective, contextualists argue that since it is impossible to ever have an objective (context-free) perspective on human development and behavior, it is also impossible to make judgments that are not contextually based (Burman, 1994). The ecological theories of the likes of Vygotsky, Lewin, and Bronfenbrenner not only inform the conceptual underpinnings of my model but also fit into the contextualist paradigm.

The ecological perspective goes beyond providing a framework for identifying and conceptualizing the multisystem factors that influence development (Lewthwaite, 2011). It considers an individual's environment in general and, in particular, how the setting and the way in which individual and external forces interplay influence development. For example, an ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) sees one's environment as a "set of nested structures, each inside the next like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 22), where a person's development is a product of a variety of critical dimensions including the individual's personal attributes, context, process, and time (Adamsons, O'Brien, & Pasley, 2007). The ecological perspective underscores processes, patterns, and relationships that might influence development and drive or thwart particular decisions and actions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lewthwaite, 2011).

Ecology and College Choice

To be sure, some of the sociological and economic college choice lenses examine aspects of one's social context relevant to college-going. An ecological model differs in that its focus rests on the ecosystem around the individual and the college-going behavior, specifically processes and relationships between contextual factors that ultimately result in a college decision. Applied to the study of college aspirations, the ecological model suggests that research considers simultaneously the various environments which impact a student's decision to pursue higher education and attends to the relationships between these contexts (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Thus, a complete understanding of the college decision-making process requires research that examines both contextual and individual factors concurrently (Bregman, 2010).

One of the most important reasons for using an ecological framework to understand college-going decisions and trajectories is that it does not assume that factors identified in the "traditional" population are similar to students with different experiences (Sasao & Sue, 1993), such as post-traditional students and NFT students. Unlike models which assume that most students can and want to study full time and live on campus, an ecological model is flexible enough to fit any student situation, from a full-time student just out of high school and living in a residence hall to a returning, part-time adult learner with a full-time job and a family to support (Renn, 2003). Students of any description have multiple microsystems, though some students will be con-

centrated in the college setting while others will have more diverse settings (Renn, 2003).

Going beyond simply identifying college choice patterns to examining the context of information, opportunity, and time can greatly enhance a contemporary understanding of specific students and higher education contexts. Perhaps one of the biggest criticisms of the contextualist paradigm in general, and ecological models in particular, is that contexts and ecosystems are so broad and complex that it is virtually impossible to figure out where to start and what to include. The model I present here, however, provides three nuanced, intersecting dimensions that address significant areas of impact in college-going that are useful and practical for empirical study.

The Iloh Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories

The Iloh model of college-going decisions and trajectories draws from the ecological tradition and emphasizes three bidirectional forces that shape individual college decisions (see figure 1). Specifically, it focuses on three different contexts—information, time, and opportunity—to highlight how diverse prospective students, who are social actors embedded in complex ecosystems, decide on their higher education pathway.

I developed this model based on my analysis of several previous and ongoing empirical studies involving students enrolled in open admissions institutions of higher learning (e.g., for-profit and community colleges), NFT students, and post-traditional students, as well as my other investigations of college choice and college-going narratives. I determined the three dimensions of this model through an examination of these twenty-first-century college dynamics and an extensive review of the college choice literature and its limitations. Information, time, and opportunity each illustrate a dimension that relates to the other two contexts but cannot be completely captured in any one of the other contexts. For example, a component such as college selectivity can ultimately be captured in the context of opportunity, but the notion of opportunity is far too expansive to fit into a dimension of college selectivity.

Theoretical Relationship Between Information, Time, and Opportunity

Different than the dominant college choice model, the three components of the Iloh model of college-going decisions and trajectories are not sequential. For example, time does not come before information in the same way that, in the dominant model, predisposition comes before search and choice. At one point in someone's life, the three constructs might suggest one decision and trajectory, and another point might present another possibility. With this model, college-going is not a static process but, instead, is an ongoing interplay of three factors. Time, information, and opportunity depend on each other and yet still operate as distinguishable parts of an important whole.

FIGURE 1 *The Iloh model of college-going decisions and trajectories*



Context of Information

All students have decisions to make regarding college attendance. Information is critical in shaping the decisions one makes. Some students have help in this matter from reliable college knowledge sources that inform best-fit postsecondary options. Unfortunately, college information is not created, distributed, and disseminated equitably. Accordingly, this dimension highlights both the access to and the quality of information students harness in making college-going decisions. Students with access to multiple sources of credible information are likely able to make more informed decisions. The source through which information is presented is also important to its effectiveness—“the wrong messenger can make the right information ineffective” (Baum & Schwartz, 2015, p. 42).

Information Deserts

The Iloh model considers the variability in the type of college information one possesses in their context. In some environments, information deserts, it is difficult to access or find contemporary and general college-going information. This contributes to information asymmetry in the higher education marketplace overall as well as pervasive inequities for some and privileges for others in college-going decisions and trajectories.

The term *information desert* is meant to indicate a failure of society, not particular communities, to democratize and make college information accessible across diverse communities and contexts. Individuals embedded in informa-

tion deserts are often distant from college information that is both current and unbiased. Current information reflects contemporary structures. Unbiased, or neutral, information is more general in nature and less directed toward enrollment in a particular institution or sector. Institutions might be more successful with targeted advertisements to people in information deserts.

While the context of information is critical for understanding college-going decisions and trajectories, it works in conjunction with the rest of the components of the model to provide a nuanced understanding of the decisions. An older prospective student, for example, can be far removed from updated information pertinent to quality decision making, because the last time they received such information was several years ago, back in high school. Another prospective student can have information, but only information about opportunities at certain colleges and universities, such as technical or vocational schools. Accordingly, information does not stand on its own but, rather, interacts with the two other dimensions, time and opportunity.

Context of Time

Time is a complex but significant component of any person's college-going decision. For the purpose of my model, I consider time in both basic and advanced forms. Time as it relates to college-going can be understood through moments and events that have occurred throughout one's life as well as an individual's chronological age (Adamsons et al., 2007). I also consider micro-time, what is occurring during some specific activity or interaction; meso-time, the extent to which activities and interactions occur with the same consistency in the person's environment; and macro-time, historical context and timing of certain events (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Micro-time could be someone not having the job prospects they hoped for because of a lack of educational credentials; meso-time could be someone driving past a billboard for a particular college every day on the way to work; and macro-time could be a state's development of free tuition legislation, which could greatly impact the opportunity and viability of attending a specific college or university.

By focusing on time, this model draws attention to the social, educational, and historical events that may have led to a particular college decision or path. In doing so, it can account for the student who is going to college for the first time directly out of high school and for the older person with some college experience but no degree, now enrolling in their third college. The model also highlights how the context of opportunity and information may look completely different at two different points in the life of one person, thus producing potentially different college decisions and trajectories. Conversely, relatively little change in someone's context of opportunity and information over the course of time might lead someone to repeat or make similar kinds of college decisions.

Context of Opportunity

In order to explore why some students decide to attend certain colleges, it is important to examine the context of opportunity, which situates the perceived and real opportunity any student has in their pursuit of higher education generally and specific institutions in particular. All students operate in distinct cultural and social environments that influence their opportunities around college as well as “their perceptions of the types of higher education institutions they can access, long before they begin exploring specific college options” (Castleman, Baum, & Schwartz, 2015, p. 5). Therefore, aspects of one’s identity, life experiences, as well as their familial, educational, spatial, financial, political, technological, and community context, can all influence whether a prospective student believes college or a particular college is right/possible for them.

While high numbers of students from all races, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds aspire to higher education, there are increasing gaps between underrepresented students’ initial college aspirations and their later beliefs and actual enrollment (Iloh, 2014; Schneider & Saw, 2016). For example, the 2013 update of the High School Longitudinal Survey of 2009 found that 99 percent of incoming high school freshmen were either “very sure” or likely to pursue a bachelor’s degree, but by their junior year only 81 percent of all students surveyed expected to earn at least a bachelor’s degree (Ingels & Dalton, 2013). Students from low-income families saw the largest drop between their initial aspirations in ninth grade and their expectations in eleventh grade; about 40 percent of these students no longer expected to earn a bachelor’s degree, even if they had demonstrated high academic achievement (Ingels & Dalton, 2013).

The context of opportunity examines both the perception and the reality of opportunity. While there is an array of higher education offerings, for many underserved populations these options aren’t available to them. This could be due to financial constraints, geographic distance, lack of child-care services, or rigid scheduling, all of which pose real barriers to college-going in many postsecondary education “options.” These barriers are important for understanding what contributes to varying contexts of opportunity for individuals.

Educational spaces and institutions of higher learning also mediate real and perceived college opportunities. For example, some colleges and universities market themselves as being interested in educating a diverse student population in order to promote inclusive excellence but do not actually honor this commitment in their expenditures, admissions and recruitment efforts, and enrollment practices. Furthermore, in K–12 education, prior college spaces, and social environments, students may also receive signals that steer them in the direction of particular colleges. For example, one person might receive messages that their best opportunity would be vocational higher education, whereas another person with a different context might be encouraged to

apply to highly selective institutions. Many of these institutional inconsistencies as well as educational signals and messages are conducive to the continued stratification of postsecondary education.

Choice as a Privileged and Limiting Term

While my new conceptual model joins the chorus of college choice literature and theory, it does not include the word *choice*. In putting forth a model of college-going decisions and trajectories, I assert that choice is a problematic way of understanding how twenty-first-century prospective students navigate higher education decisions and attend college. First, it is a privileged term. The expenses, information, opportunity costs, and time associated with pursuing college inherently constrain the options or opportunities for engagement in higher education at all, let alone at a particular time or at certain kinds of institutions. For example, some college hopefuls are limited by their location, work and family needs, and income, so their choice set is considerably narrower than is someone's with greater resources. Most college choice models are based on students who, in theory, have a wide choice set due to the time in which they are deciding to enroll (after high school), greater geographic flexibility, and their position in life (young adults with few obligations). My model illuminates how the notion of choice distorts our understanding of vast inequities and varying life circumstances.

Second, choice offers a limited way of understanding contemporary college-going trajectories. Viewed as a discrete event, it obscures past decisions that ultimately narrow the choice set available in the present or future. My model, instead, accounts for complex college pathways and not necessarily just discrete choices made based on initial preferences and desires. Thus, the term inaccurately presumes that there are multiple options for college hopefuls at one given time. It is plausible, then, that we are observing problematic pathways with options that become narrower as students get older or stop out. While current higher education conversations might see choice and college-going decisions as one and the same, based on the context of twenty-first-century postsecondary education and prospective students' lives, *choice* can skew complex narratives.

Applying the Theory

In this new model, the three components are contextually interwoven, which warrants context-specific data collection. Because opportunity, time, and information are ecological components, the constructs require some level of proximity to informants in the data collection process to ascertain the contextual narratives beyond what survey data might tell us. As such, this model lends itself to approaches that prioritize a deeper understanding of the voices and environments of informants. Use of the model also suggests an attempt to understand evolution and variation in college decisions and trajectories by way of intentional focus on each context and their relationship to each other.

Conclusion

If we asked ourselves if we possess the lenses necessary to bring into focus the reality of today's postsecondary education, the answer would likely be no. With major changes to our higher education landscape, new ways of understanding it, empirically and conceptually, are essential. While the new conceptual model I present here does not profess to be a panacea, addressing all gaps in popular college choice models, it is intended to be expansive and attentive to the current higher education landscape. Further, it is designed to be a step forward in understanding college-going for a diverse array of students in a complex and stratified market. With better understanding of the contexts of college-going decisions and trajectories, more sophisticated research and solutions can be developed that address contemporary college-going narratives hidden, problematically, in plain sight.

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From: Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu> <ciloh@uci.edu>
Sent time: 03/24/2020 09:38:23 AM
To: Shay Little <shaydlittle@gmail.com>
Cc: SILVERMAN_SCOTT <silverman_scott@smc.edu>
Subject: Re: Abstract submission inquiry for Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice (JSARP)

No worries. Thank you so much for your response! I will be sending two to you for review. Thank you.

Best,

On Mon, Mar 23, 2020 at 2:40 PM Shay Little <shaydlittle@gmail.com> wrote:

Dr, Iloh--

Please email us your abstract for review. My apologies on my delay in responding!

Shay Little

On Wed, Mar 11, 2020 at 1:20 PM Constance A Iloh <ciloh@uci.edu> wrote:

Dear Dr. Little and Dr. Silverman,

I hope this email finds you both well! May I email you my abstract for submission consideration in the special issue of JSARP, "Health and Wellbeing?" Should I just email to you directly?

Thank you so much for your attention to this correspondence. I look forward to hearing from you. Have a wonderful day!

Kind regards,

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