

Title: Towards bridging the belongingness, progression and attainment gap for our BAME students

Presenters: Debra Cureton, Julie Hughes, Jenni Jones

Keywords: Attainment Gap, BAME, Belonging, Transitions, GTAs, Academic Coaches

The ethnic based differential degree outcome and lower rates of BAME student retention are an education inequities that has received substantive attention and inquiry (Connor et. al, 2004; Buckley-Irvine, 2017). Although these works offer some explanations to why these gaps occur, these findings have generated minimal impact on the continuing national outcomes picture. This indicates that there is still a strong need to better understand and bridge the gap between strategic intention and intervention, and how this learning is embedded within learning and teaching environments. This is especially important within the current HE climate where the Teaching Excellence Framework considers student satisfaction, continuation and employment outcomes; all of which are metrics that can be negatively affected by differential HE experiences and outcomes.

The corpus of work around degree differentials suggests that four key areas impact on differential outcomes: Relationships, Pedagogy, Social Capital and the Psychosocial sphere (Mountford-Zimbdar, 2017). All of these areas are crucially linked to BAME student success, moreover, they are interlinked and a deficit in one area negatively impacts on all areas (Cousin & Cureton, 2012). Recently, work has linked belongingness with student success (Thomas, 2012; Thomas et. al. 2017), and proposes that belonging differs among ethnic groups (Cureton & Gravestock, 2019).

This presentation highlights how one Midlands Post-92 HEI has explored differential student belonging in relation to its attainment gap, and as a result how their strategic interventions have been embedded within an inclusive learning and teaching environment. At this HEI, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) were employed to support Level 4 students in negotiating these four areas. This work reinforced the importance of supporting and developing student's sense of belonging in HE settings, in order to more successfully negotiate their new learning environment.

In addition, this HEI explored the differential experiences of belonging using the Belongingness Survey (Yorke, 2016) with 941 students. Following this, an analysis of 200 first year student reflections on their first 6 weeks was undertaken to gather the key moderating factors. This resulted in key themes that again highlight the link between a sense of belonging and academic success (Cousin & Cureton 2012; Thomas 2012 & Thomas et al., 2017), with a particular emphasis on any differences for BAME students. Following this, the role of the GTAs has developed and a new role of Academic Coach has been created to support and develop a sense of belonging during transition into university and first year of study. This presentation will talk through the key elements of the journey towards proactively ensuring belongingness is open to and includes all students.

Buckley-Irvine, N. (2017) Universities' shame – unpicking the black attainment gap. Online: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/analysis-universities-shame-black-attainment-gap/> [Accessed April 19]

Connor, Tyers, T. Modood and J. Hillage (2004) "Why the Difference? A Closer Look at Higher Education Minority Ethnic Students and Graduates", DfES Research Report RR552. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013556/index.shtml>

Cousin, G. and Cureton, D. (2012). *Disparities in student attainment (DiSA)*. York: Higher Education Academy.

Cureton, D. & Gravestock, P., (2019) *We Belong': differential sense of belonging and its meaning for different ethnic groups in higher education*. COMPASS (in press)

Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S., Higham, L. (2015). *Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes*, Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England, HEFCE.

Thomas, L. (2012). *Building Student Engagement and Belonging at a Time of Change in Higher Education*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Thomas, L., Hill, M., O'Mahony, J. and Yorke, M. (2017). *Supporting Student Success: strategies for institutional change: What Works? Student Retention and Success programme Final Report*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Yorke, M. (2016). The development and initial use of a survey of student 'belongingness', engagement and self-confidence in UK higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(1), pp. 154-166.

Bios

Dr Debra Cureton is an Associate Professor of Equality in Learning and Teaching at the University of Wolverhampton. Her research contributes to the University's work in the enhancement attainment and retention, and the reduction of attainment gaps. As a Research Development Manager, Debra also supports the development of the researchers at the University.

Dr Jenni Jones is an Associate Professor of Coaching and Mentoring in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wolverhampton. Jenni teaches both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. She is the Course Leader for the PGCert/MA in Coaching and Mentoring Programmes (since 2005), and leads the ILM Coaching and Mentoring awards and lead the Business School/Institute of Directors Student Mentoring programme.

Julie Hughes has worked at the University of Wolverhampton for 15 years was the Head of Department for Post Compulsory Education for 5 years. Julie is an HEA National Teaching Fellow and Vice Chair of the UCET PCE Committee. Julie is currently the Head of Transitions Work Streams in the University's College of Learning and Teaching.