60-Second SoTL

Episode 3 – Disrupted Access and Success: Students' Transition to University during COVID

(Piano Music)

00:02

Jessie L. Moore:
How do students describe their learning experiences during COVID, and how did the pandemic impact their access and success during their transition to higher education? That's the focus of this week's **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. I'm Jessie Moore.

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(Piano Music)

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In "Disrupted Access and Success: Students' Transition to University in the Time of COVID-19," published in *SOTL in the South*, Helen Inglis, Celeste Combrinck, and Zach Simpson interviewed students about their perceptions of the pandemic's impact on students' learning and explore implications for students' access to and success in higher education.

The authors conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with fourteen students. The participants reflected a stratified sampling of second-year engineering students who were "at the margins of success" at a large, research-based South African university. The interview questions explored students' first-year experiences and transitions to university, but in this article, the authors focus on how these second-year students thought the pandemic was impacting current first-year students and how the university could contribute to first-year students' success.

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Inglis, Combrinck, and Simpson used discourse analysis to identify discursive themes in their interview data. One overarching take-away is that the pandemic amplified existing inequities in transition to and success in higher education. Specifically, the pandemic exasperated challenges with the transition to university, with lock-ins and online learning compromising first-year students' experiences developing strategies for attending class and seeking support services. Participants noted that a contributing factor to this disrupted transition was that first-year students did not have time to identify and develop meaningful relationships – particularly peer relationships – that could contribute to their university transition and academic success.

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The pandemic also amplified socioeconomic and cultural differences among students. The forced transition to remote learning highlighted inequities in technological resourcing. And while some students returned to comfortable home settings, others returned to family work expectations – cleaning, cooking, tending to livestock – that competed with their studies.

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The researchers report that half of their participants identified the pandemic lockdown as distressing. Others focused on resilience, but some who advanced self-resilience narratives were more likely to come from highly-resourced schools and family settings that supported their academic achievement.

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The authors note that the academic and social transitions to university are non-linear and "complicated by class position and individual circumstances." The pandemic surfaced many of the differences in students' experiences of transition, but they existed pre-pandemic and universities have an obligation to address them. Inglis, Combrinck, and Simpson suggest that universities should foster opportunities for students to develop supportive relationships, openly address the challenges of transitioning to university, and cultivate a culture that recognizes and honors the multiplicity of students' experiences rather than forcing students to adapt to one specific model to succeed.

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To learn more, follow the link in our show notes to read this open access article.

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(Piano Music)

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Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning.** Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

03:26

(Piano Music)