

60-Second SoTL

Episode 13 – Staff Experiences Supporting Students from Equity Groups

(Piano Music)

00:03

Jessie L. Moore:

How do academic and support staff who are in frequent contact with non-traditional student cohorts think about and respond to student diversity? 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 "Supporting students from equity groups: experiences of staff and considerations for institutions," published as an open access article in *Studies in Higher Education*, Suzanne Macqueen, Erica Southgate, and Jill Scevak share findings from a qualitative study conducted at a regional Australian university with a history of equity in access. They conducted focus groups with 14 academic and support staff participants from the humanities, student support services, and nursing to learn about staff experiences working with low socio-economic status and non-traditional students.

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Reflexive thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts suggested themes around identification of diversity, student hardship and resilience, and impacts on staff.

Regarding identification of diversity, participants recognized that institutional statistics predicted high-enrollments by low socio-economic status, first-generation, and non-traditional students, but academic and support staff often did not realize students held these identities until students disclosed them. Staff acknowledged the complexity of issues facing these students, including cultural capital, care giving for family members, and a lack of belonging or student identity.

Staff also were aware that some students persevered through extreme hardships related to finances, career responsibilities, and other life situations, and they expressed admiration for students' resilience.

Macqueen, Southgate, and Scevak's participants demonstrated an ethic of care and willingness to support students in ways that often extended beyond their job descriptions, sometimes at a personal cost for the academic and support staff, as participants often prioritized student interactions over other work responsibilities, their own continued studies, and time with their own families.

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While acknowledging that the majority of their participants were female, the researchers identified gender differences in staff responses about understanding and supporting non-traditional students, with student care work undertaken predominantly by female staff.

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Ultimately, the authors conclude that systemic change is needed at the institutional level to address structural inequities in higher education and to better recognize and support university staff working with non-traditional students.

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To learn more about this study, follow the link in our show notes to read the open-access article and to review our supplemental resources for this episode.

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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.

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(Piano Music)