Introduction

“We Belong” is a diversity and inclusion themed podcast series for and about doctoral students and post-doctoral scholars. Within a sound stage where students come to exchange ideas, receive support, and promote a sense of belonging while also discussing barriers to inclusion such as bias and unequal access to resources.

Objectives

The primary purpose of the project is for podcast listeners to explore how others have developed a framework that has helped them find their voice and connect with communities that support equity, diversity and inclusion. As well as providing a forum for exploring students experience of lack of belonging, as they grappled with, made sense of, and responded to bias in academia and beyond.

Learning objectives include:

• Increase awareness of how diverse students experience the academic environment
• Engagement of critical thinking while learning about inclusion and exclusion in higher education
• Understanding how bias negatively impacts retention and academic development

Methods

One-on-one interviews were conducted in a recording environment using open-ended semi-structured questions based on broad themes around: diversity and inclusion, dealing with implicit and explicit bias, motivators and detractors from educational pursuit, and inspiration as well as concerns about the current state of higher education and under-represented students.

Results

A total of five doctoral students participated in podcast interviews: Two students from UC Davis School of Engineering, one from UC Davis School of Native American Studies, and one from UC Davis School of Medicine.

“Even with all the students together in my department, there’s not a lot of women, there’s not a lot of brown people. Being one of the few... has made me want to succeed. For some people it can be very difficult to go through an academic program without other people who look like you. For me, I say, all right right there’s not a lot of people who look like me, so let me go through the program and be one of the first. A trailblazer. The pioneer, I’m paving this way, making a pipeline for other people to also succeed. This is what motivates me. My passion comes from being able to be an example for someone else” – Destiny

Questions I get are, “What can you do with a PhD in nursing?” Because, regardless of gender, a lot of people don’t realize what you can do with a PhD in nursing. Unfortunately, nursing is still misunderstood as just “follow the doctor’s orders”. That’s still the mindset a lot of people have. When, in reality about the care delivery, patient safety, and how you can better provide evidence-based care to your patients and their families. - Charlie

“I went through much of my undergraduate education feeling like the educational system wasn’t made for people like me. I don’t really know that other people were struggling too. Because of this, I always felt I had to do things the hard way...School used to be difficult because I was a student who was balancing academics and family priorities.” – Victoria

“One of the things that I’d like to see is a Native American studies program with a multitude of Native American professors who come from different nations and can teach different areas. I think that would be fantastic to see a teacher who looks like you, and is familiar with the challenges and the struggles, and the rewards from their own lived experience” - Rachel

Summary

All students spoke about being the first in their family to go to college and the theme of what is means to be “first generation college student” was explored.

Other themes emerged, including the role of mentoring, building connections with other students and faculty of color, struggling to figure out education systems and financing education, recognizing and addressing bias, impostor syndrome, working with allies, dealing with micro-aggression, and what the university could do to improve diversity and inclusion via random acts of inclusion versus transformative inclusion.

Conclusions

Originally “We Belong” podcast was going to be a sound stage environment of small groups of students and faculty together to discuss broader themes related to diversity, inclusion and equity in academia. The scheduling logistics turned out to be too great.

The result is a more intimate exploration of personal, community and institutional factors that shaped the choices and directions of each of the students interviewed as they navigated large education systems.

Acknowledgements

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To listen to the podcasts scan here for link:  http://www.buzzsprout.com/286388