Student Interview #2 Feedback – Nathan Mack

Introduction

As was done for the last report, I chose to interview a student named Michaela at the University of Kansas. Michaela is currently a 19-year old in-state sophomore studying music education who was raised in a nearby community. This interview explored the concepts of Input and Environment, defined by Astin as the characteristics that students bring to institutions and the environment that the institution creates for those students. Michaela provided me with some very interesting feedback, most of which iterated that both institutions and students have a shared responsibility to ensure student success (defined here by persistence and graduation).

Input

Michaela noted that in many ways, input serves as an extremely important factor in ensuring student success. When discussing why some students do not graduate from university, that at minimum attempted to, she stressed that students must navigate college with an understanding of ‘why they are there’ and ‘what they hope to achieve by being there.’ Her experience has shown her that most students that leave university do so because they felt forced, either by parents, society or other factors, to attend college even though they were not mentally prepared. They did not arrive at the institution’s doorsteps with the correct mindset and were thus destined not to succeed. She also added that finances play a significant role, as many students’ economic backgrounds deal them extreme hardship during university. The other factor that we discussed was where the students arrive from, geographically. She mentioned that students from the local area are generally more successful as they have a greater understanding of their future at the institution. Rural students are generally more sheltered and their adjustment to college life
tends to be more difficult as they were inadequately prepared for the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the university. Out-of-state students typically have more independence than local students, though their ultimate success depends on their drive and motivation as mentioned above.

Environment

At many points during the conversation, Michaela reinforced the idea that her institution is too large to adequately affect student persistence and graduation. The university does not currently possess the time or resources to use its environment to affect student outcomes and its students are keenly aware of this fact. Most students do not engage the institution when they decide to leave, as they do not believe that they will receive any support or guidance. The environment created unfortunately has an effect on student success in that the institution lacks the appropriate support system for its large student population. She blames both the student and the institution in this regard, as students must have the motivation to persist and the institution must create an environment that supports them in times of hardship. When asked to comment on whether it would be possible for a university to ensure a 100% graduation rate, she mentioned that the institution would have to be very small with significant resources and personal attention. It is only in this scenario in which success can be guaranteed. Thus, in Michaela’s opinion, the environment does matter.

Conclusion

Michaela’s interview stressed the shared responsibility and accountability of both input and environment in discussions about student persistence and graduation. Students must begin and navigate college life with the appropriate mindset and support system and the institutional environment can help ensure success with adequate resources and guidance.