

Understanding the Personal, Academic, and Social Connections among Chico State Students

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Abstract: Three first-year students formed a research team to conduct ethnographic research. The authors used structured interviews to investigate the mindset and experience that first-year students go through. After conducting ten interviews, the research team analyzed and organized the data into different themes based on the interview topics. With our participation in the U-Course, we have become young ethnographers. Our research goal is to identify the transition of first-year students from different perspectives. Through this process, we can gain a closer insight into what students need to better succeed in this university. Our group focused on the transition of first years to Chico State and how it could be improved.

Research Question

How have first-year students struggled or strived in making connections at the University and Chico? We tried to confront this question at three points; social, academic, and personal.

Methods

We carried out face-to-face interviews with ten first-year students. By analyzing this raw interview data we found common patterns for many transitioning freshmen. By seeing both the common and unique problems, we can gauge what issues or actions should be taken in order to improve freshmen's transition.

We intended to interview first-year students of different genders. We interviewed six females and four males. One of the females was 20 years of age and the rest of the students were 18 years of age. From this, we benefited by receiving helpful data from this age gap by means of her increase in experience over the course of time. At this point in her academic career, she would realize what would have better prepared her for later years at Chico State.

The interviews allowed participants to describe their personal experiences attending Chico State and what they believe would help their experience. After finding 10 various participants, with the consent of the person, our group interviewed each student individually. The interview process consisted of one member being the interviewer and asking in-depth questions while the other two took attentive notes. Once all the interviews were completed, we compared all the data and response in order to find any possible common issues and strategies.

Results

Our project has shown that the feeling of isolation is repeated again and again with little knowledge of what to do or the options that Chico offers. Interview data revealed that students do not feel a good connection with the City of Chico, which can in part lead to a more isolated feeling while attending Chico State.

Recommendations

We recommend an intentional effort to foster more interactions with older students to know what to do and where to go or places and tips for both the University and Chico. This “buddy system” could supplement the REACH program since REACH cannot handle all freshman students for solely that purpose. This idea can open a door for jobs for students as mentors at the University. It will make first-year students’ transition to the University easier because they will get familiar with its surrounding and adapt quicker. They will also have an opportunity to meet and socialize with other first-year students.

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